

## **Pistachio Nutritional Benefits in a Nutshell**

### **Super Nutrient Nut!**

- Nutrient density, or Index of Nutritional Quality (INQ), is a measurement of a food's nutrient composition compared to its calorie contribution. A food can be considered nutritious if four nutrients have INQs of 1 or more, or if two nutrients have INQs of 2 or higher.<sup>1</sup>
- Pistachios are “super nutrient dense” because they are dense in eight nutrients: thiamin, vitamin B6, copper, and manganese; and INQs ranging from 1 to 1.7 for potassium, fiber, phosphorus and magnesium.<sup>2</sup> Comparatively potato chips contain no dense nutrients.

### **Eat a Handful Daily for Good Health**

- Super nutrient dense, pistachios are a superior snack choice. Low on the glycemic index and naturally cholesterol free, pistachios offer good heart health benefits, plenty of antioxidants and good fat. A one-ounce serving of pistachios scores higher on the USDA's antioxidant scorecard than 1 cup of green tea.

### **Outstanding Heart Stats**

- Pistachios are included in the FDA's first ever qualified health claim, approved in July 2003, which states: “Scientific evidence suggests, but does not prove, that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, such as pistachios, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.”
- Four ways pistachios help your heart:
  - Most of the fat in pistachios – almost 90% - is “good” or unsaturated fat, which can lower blood cholesterol along with heart disease.<sup>3</sup>
  - Of all snack nuts, pistachios offer the highest level of phytosterols, and are a powerful source of fiber, both of which reduce the absorption of cholesterol from the diet<sup>4,5</sup>
  - Pistachios provide potassium. An inadequate intake of potassium is characterized by increased blood pressure and may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.<sup>6</sup>
  - Pistachios offer the second highest amount of polyphenols among nuts. Polyphenols are antioxidants with potential heart health benefits.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Eyes Have It**

- Pistachios contain a significant amount of the antioxidant lutein, about 13 times the amount as the next highest nut, hazelnuts.<sup>8</sup>
- Intakes of lutein are associated with a reduced risk of age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of irreversible blindness. Macular

degeneration is a breakdown of the central portion of the retina and the principal cause of blindness among people ages 65 and older.

### Here's the Catch for Dieters

Offering nutritional “bang” for the calorie, pistachios have a significant amount of protein, fat and fiber, which together increase the feeling of fullness. Consider:

- **The South Beach Diet®** says that cracking and eating 30 pistachios makes it a more elaborate, and therefore more satisfying, snack.
- **The DASH Diet®** recommends 4-5 servings of nuts each week
- **The Mediterranean Diet** highlights tree nuts, such as pistachios, as one of the major food groups associated with a reduced risk of heart disease.
- **The Zone Diet®** recommends choosing foods rich in mono-unsaturates such as pistachios.
- **Weight Watchers®** says nuts are “great snacks”; a one-ounce serving of pistachios equals 4 points.
- **The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005** recommend nuts as a snack, on salads or in main dishes, as an alternative to meat, poultry or beans.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Guthrie, H. A., & Bagby, R. S. (1989). *Introductory nutrition* (7th ed.). St. Louis: Times Mirror/Mosby College Pub.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Dept. of Agriculture & Agriculture Research Service, (2005). Nutrient data from the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Release 17 (2004) <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/Data/SR17> and California Pistachio Commission website, [www.pistachios.org](http://www.pistachios.org), accessed July 16, 2005

<sup>3</sup>*Institute of Medicine, 2002a). Dietary Reference Intakes for Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat, Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein, and Amino Acids.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

<sup>4</sup>Phillips, K. M., Ruggio, D. M., & Ashraf-Khorassani, M. (2005). Phytosterol composition of nuts and seeds commonly consumed in the United States. *J Agric Food Chem*, 53(24), 9436-9445.

<sup>5</sup>Tsai, C.-J., Leitzmann, M. F., Hu, F. B., Willett, W. C., & Giovannucci, E. L. (2004). Frequent nut consumption and decreased risk of cholecystectomy in women. *Am J Clin Nutr*, 80(1), 76-81.

<sup>6</sup>Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Dietary Reference Intakes for Water, Potassium, Sodium, Chloride, and Sulfate.* Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

<sup>7</sup>Wu, X., Beecher, G. R., Holden, J. M., Haytowitz, D. B., Gebhardt, S. E., & Prior, R. L. (2004). Lipophilic and hydrophilic antioxidant capacities of common foods in the United States. *J Agric Food Chem*, 52(12), 4026-4037.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Research Service, 2005