

Pecan Nut Tree

Carya illinoensis



Health benefits of pecans include reduced risk of high cholesterol levels, hypertension, diabetes, gallstone disease, and cancer. It has antioxidant properties and helps in weight management. It also protects vital organs from toxic effects of cyclophosphamide.

What is a Pecan?

Pecan is a brown nut with an edible kernel similar to walnut. Pecans have a sweet, buttery taste as compared to other nuts. It is best known to be used in pecan pie, a classic American dish baked during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The pecan tree, scientifically called *Carya illinoensis*, is a species of hickory native to the United States and Mexico. It is the state tree of Texas and Native Americans are found to have used it for its medicinal value. The tree may grow up to a height of 44 m with flowering happening in the spring season. Though it used to grow wildly, in recent years, it has been included in the list of the major fruits that are domesticated.

Apart from America, it is now cultivated in some countries of Africa, Asia and also in Australia. Hickory is a fuelwood species, which produces a high yield of

charcoal that has economic value. The wood is also very useful in making furniture.

Nutritional Value of Pecans

Pecans contain energy, fiber, amino acids, starch, and sugars. These nuts are the best source of plant-based protein. Other nutrients in this fruit include thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, beta-carotene, folate, folic acid, and vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin C, vitamin E, and vitamin K.

Amongst minerals, pecan is rich in calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, manganese, and selenium. It contains no sodium and is, therefore, helpful for people with high blood pressure and other dangerous diseases.



Pecan nuts are rich in healthy monounsaturated fats and 70% of a single nut comprises of these fats. This percentage is highest amongst all the nuts, which gives you all the benefits listed below.

Consuming a handful of pecans translates to ingestion of different types of nutrients into the body that is impossible even on taking the laboratory prepared supplements.

Health Benefits of Pecans

Due to the composition of pecan, several studies have been carried out to ascertain the benefits of this fruit. Here are the health benefits that are associated with the consumption of this nut.

Lower Cholesterol Levels

Eating pecans on a regular basis helps balance cholesterol levels. High level of cholesterol in the body is one of the causes of several cardiovascular disorders. A study conducted by Rajaram S. et al. suggests that pecans, with their high monosaturated fat, may be prescribed as a part of the diet for everyone who wants to lower their cholesterol levels.

Control Diabetes

Pecans are beneficial in maintaining blood sugar levels especially for those suffering from type 2 diabetes. Diabetes increases the risk of cardiovascular disorders and hence, it is necessary to have a healthy diet that has necessary nutrients. Their consumption is not only recommended for those with a diabetic condition but for others too, to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Regulate Blood Pressure

Pecans have protein, vitamin E, and antioxidant properties which help in protecting the heart and reducing the risk of hypertension. High blood pressure, if left unmonitored, can be a reason behind the occurrence of heart attacks and strokes.

Prevent Heart Diseases

Pecan contains constituents like tocopherol and flavan-3-ol monomers that help in inhibiting oxidation of the lipids that exist in the blood which in turn offers protection against heart diseases. The research was conducted to study the effect of pecan on postprandial antioxidant capacity and catechins and decrease LDL oxidation in humans and the findings suggest that bioactive composition may contribute to the postprandial antioxidant defense.

Weight Loss

Pecans boost metabolism and enhance satiety and are, therefore, also beneficial in managing weight. Although they are rich in fats, they also contain protein and fiber which may make one feel full for longer duration and thus help in lowering intake of other high-calorie foods.

Prevent Gallstones

Consumption of pecans is also associated with reduced risk of gallstones. Findings of research carried out to study the effect of consumption of nuts on the risk of gallstones suggest that frequent consumption of pecans may reduce the risk of gallstone diseases in men.



Anticancer Potential

Research published by Dr. reducing the risk of cancer. They are rich in phenolic compounds, oleic and ellagic acids, tannins which are associated with the prevention of various cancers, particularly breast cancer.

Prevent Toxicity

Cyclophosphamide compound is associated with life-threatening diseases. A research study suggests that pecan shell with its antioxidant effects may

protect the vital organs such as heart, kidneys, and the bladder from cyclophosphamide-induced toxicity.

Prevent Inflammation

Magnesium, present in pecan nuts, is a nutrient which delivers many anti-inflammatory benefits. It reduces the inflammation in the arteries, and therefore, lowers the risk of arthritis, heart diseases, atherosclerosis, and many other conditions.

Improve Brain Function

The nutrients like manganese, copper, and thiamine, in pecans, are connected to the healthy functioning of the brain. Thiamine is administered to patients with Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, which is a brain disorder occurring in alcoholics. Copper and manganese, on the other hand, prevents the damage caused by free radicals in the brain.

Boost Immunity

Pecans are rich in manganese. This trace mineral can prevent the damage caused by free radicals in your body. It does that with its antioxidant properties and protects the body from infections and diseases by boosting the immunity.

Ease Menstruation

Pecans help women fight the symptoms of menstruation like cramps and mood swings. The nutrients like manganese and calcium in these nuts are actually the stars that help in keeping women healthy.

Improve Digestion

As pecan nuts are rich in dietary fiber, they help in maintaining the colon health by facilitating regular bowel movements. They also extend their benefit to preventing constipation and many other associated disorders.

Bone Health

Phosphorus and calcium, in pecan nuts, aid in the maintenance of bone health. Our bones consist of approximately 85% phosphorus, the rest of which is found in the tissues and cells. They are deemed helpful for preventing the symptoms of osteoporosis, particularly in women. Thus, a diet that includes pecans is great for improving bone mineral density.

Skin Care

Antiaging foods are a treasure for all the people in this world. Pecans contain all the nutrients like vitamin A, vitamin E, ellagic acid, which prevent premature aging and reduce the occurrence of wrinkles. Also, the zinc content in these nuts helps achieve a toned complexion.

Eye Care

Vitamin E-rich pecan nuts are a great addition to your diet. They are often associated with reducing the risk of age-related macular degeneration, thus keeping the eyes healthy even while you are aging. These nuts are also recommended for preventing the occurrence of cataracts.

Hair Care

Pecan nuts are widely used to treat male pattern baldness. The L-arginine, an amino acid in these nuts is a compound that increases blood circulation throughout the body, thereby strengthening the roots of the hair. Also, iron in the nuts prevents anemia and consequently, hair loss.

Pecans: Select & Store

Pecans are easily available throughout the year in major stores all over the world. Pick the ones which have more nutmeat and look fairly uniform in color and size. Make sure the pecans are stored in clean and dry containers away from any insects etc. It's better to store them in the refrigerator as that protects them from insects and also maintains the freshness of the nut.

Pecans have a long shelf life, especially when kept under the right conditions.

This is advantageous since one can buy in bulk and store for future use.

Side Effects of Pecans

The following are a few side effects that come along while eating pecans, although not everyone may experience the same.

Hives

Vomiting

Swelling of the throat

Shortness of breath

Dizziness

Hay fever

Symptoms of asthma

Consult your doctor before making any drastic changes in the diet to avoid attracting any health problems.

