

# Nuts and peanuts may protect against major causes of death

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Credit: Daniele Pellati/public domain

A paper published today in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* confirms a link between peanut and nut intake and lower mortality rates, but finds no protective effect for peanut butter. Men and women who eat

at least 10 grams of nuts or peanuts per day have a lower risk of dying from several major causes of death than people who don't consume nuts or peanuts.

The reduction in mortality was strongest for respiratory disease, neurodegenerative disease, and diabetes, followed by cancer and cardiovascular diseases. The effects are equal in men and women. Peanuts show at least as strong reductions in mortality as tree nuts, but peanut butter is not associated with mortality, researchers from Maastricht University found.

This study was carried out within the Netherlands Cohort Study, which has been running since 1986 among over 120,000 Dutch 55-69 year old men and women. Nut consumption was assessed by asking about portion size and frequency of intake of peanuts, other nuts (tree nuts), and peanut butter. The researchers from Maastricht University analyzed the relationship with overall and cause-specific mortality since 1986.

The associations between nuts and peanut intake and cardiovascular death confirm earlier results from American and Asian studies that were often focused on cardiovascular diseases. However, in this new study, it was found that mortality due to cancer, diabetes, respiratory, and neurodegenerative diseases was also lowered among users of peanuts and nuts. Project leader and epidemiologist Professor Piet van den Brandt commented: "It was remarkable that substantially lower mortality was already observed at consumption levels of 15 grams of nuts or peanuts on average per day (half a handful). A higher intake was not associated with further reduction in [mortality risk](#). This was also supported by a meta-analysis of previously published studies together with the Netherlands Cohort Study, in which cancer and respiratory mortality showed this same dose-response pattern."

Peanuts and [tree nuts](#) both contain various compounds such as

monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, various vitamins, fiber, antioxidants, and other bioactive compounds, that possibly contribute to the lower death rates. In contrast to peanuts, no association was found between peanut butter intake and [mortality](#) risk. However, besides peanuts, peanut butter contains also added components like salt and vegetable oils. In the past, it has been shown that [peanut](#) butter contains [trans fatty acids](#) and therefore the composition of [peanut butter](#) is different from peanuts. The adverse health effects of salt and trans fatty acids could inhibit the protective effects of peanuts.

**More information:** 'Relationship of tree nut, peanut, and peanut butter intake with total and cause-specific mortality: a cohort study and meta-analysis' Piet A. van den Brandt, Leo J. Schouten  
*International Journal of Epidemiology*, 2015.

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