

Eating dried fruit may be linked with better diet quality and health markers

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Don't be afraid to toss a handful of raisins or dried apples in your Thanksgiving stuffing this year—a new Penn State study has found that dried fruit may be connected with better health.

The researchers found that people who ate [dried fruit](#) were generally healthier than those who did not, and on days when people ate dried fruit they consumed greater amounts of some key nutrients than on days when they skipped. However, they also found that people consumed more total calories on days when they ate dried fruit.

Valerie Sullivan, postdoctoral researcher at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a Penn State grad student at the time of the study, said the findings suggest that dried fruit can be part of a healthy diet—with some caveats.

"Dried fruit can be a great choice for a nutritious snack, but consumers might want to be sure they're choosing unsweetened versions without added sugar," Sullivan said. "Portion sizes can also be tricky, because a serving of dried fruit is smaller than a serving of fresh since the water has been taken out. But the positive is that dried fruit can help people potentially consume more fruit because it's portable, it's shelf-stable, and can even be cheaper."

Previous research has found that poor diet contributes to nearly half of deaths from cardiovascular disease in the U.S., with a lack of fruit being a major factor. According to the researchers, fruits provide an abundance of nutrients, including fiber, potassium and several heart-healthy bioactives.

However, despite these benefits, other studies have found that people may not eat enough fruit for a number of reasons—including limited availability, cost and the fact that it can spoil quickly, among others. In the current study, the researchers wanted to examine whether dried fruit could be a healthful alternative to fresh fruit, since it could be cheaper.

"Minimally processed forms of fruit, including frozen, canned, and dried, have some advantages over fresh fruits," said Kristina Petersen, an

assistant professor of nutritional sciences at Texas Tech University and assistant research professor of nutritional sciences at Penn State at the time this work was done. "They are available year round, are relatively consistent in quality, and can be stored for far longer than fresh. Many are also less expensive per serving than their fresh counterparts."

For the study, the team used data on 25,590 participants in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Participants provided data about all the foods they had consumed in the previous 24 hours, including dried fruit. Data were also gathered about participants' cardiometabolic health—including body mass index, [waist circumference](#) and blood pressure—and their overall diet quality.

After analyzing the data, the researchers found that on average, people who reported consuming dried fruit in the survey had healthier diets than those who did not. They also tended to have lower body mass index, waist circumference, and systolic blood pressure.

Because some of the participants reported eating dried fruit on one day of the survey but not the second, the researchers were also able to examine what people's diet looked like on days they ate dried fruit versus days when they didn't.

"What I also found interesting was that people tended to eat more total fruit on the days they ate dried fruit than on days they didn't," Sullivan said. "On days when dried fruit was not eaten, however, [fresh fruit](#) intake was not higher. So dried fruit could be a way to boost overall fruit intake in people that aren't eating the recommended amounts."

Additionally, the researchers found that on days they ate dried [fruit](#), participants consumed more total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, potassium, polyunsaturated fat, and overall total calories.

"In our study, people who consumed dried fruits had a higher calorie intake but a lower BMI and waist circumference which suggests they were more physically active," said Penny Kris-Etherton, Evan Pugh University Professor of Nutritional Sciences. "So, when incorporating dried fruits, pay attention to calories and be sure to substitute out calories from low-nutrient foods for dried fruits to get the greatest benefit of eating dried fruits."

More information: Valerie K. Sullivan et al, Consumption of Dried Fruits Is Associated with Greater Intakes of Underconsumed Nutrients, Higher Total Energy Intakes, and Better Diet Quality in US Adults: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007-2016., *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2020.08.085](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2020.08.085)

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