

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**Oct 2021 Almonds**



**Almonds: Crunchy and Nutrient-Dense**

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Almonds are often called tree nuts, but they are actually seeds from the fruit of the almond tree. Almond fruit is a type of stone fruit like peaches and plums, which have a fleshy fruit exterior with a pit on the inside. Considered a ‘culinary nut’ because of their edible seeds, almonds taste great with chocolate, garlic, lemon, rice, maple syrup, vanilla, oranges, dates, berries and other stone fruits. The United States is the largest producer of almonds in the world.

Although high in calories, almonds are incredibly nutrient-dense. A one-ounce serving (about 24 almonds) has 165 calories, 14 grams of fat, 3.5 grams fiber and no cholesterol. The majority of the fat, about 85%, is monounsaturated and 15% is polyunsaturated. The high level of unsaturated fats in almonds can decrease total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels, reducing the risk of heart disease. Almonds are also rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which decrease inflammation and further reduce risk of cardiovascular disease. Despite their high number of calories, almond intake is not associated with weight gain, and can even help manage weight because their protein, fat, and fiber content can leave you feeling full longer. Like other plant foods, Almonds contain no cholesterol.

Almonds are an excellent source of riboflavin, or vitamin B2. Riboflavin helps convert food to energy, and plays a major role in growth, development, and metabolism of fat and drugs. Almonds are one of the best food sources of magnesium. Magnesium is involved in over 300 chemical reactions in the body, including nerve messaging, immune function, and heart contraction. Both insoluble and soluble fibers are found in almonds. Fiber helps move things along the digestive tract, feeds the healthy microbiome, helps maintain weight, and can help control cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Almonds contain a rich source of vitamin E. Vitamin E contains antioxidants like tocopherol, which can help reduce oxidation like that which contributes to cholesterol plaque that clogs arteries. Antioxidants can also improve blood flow, reduce blood pressure, fight free radicals, and prevent cell damage.

Most of the almonds in the United States are grown in California. Almond trees are dormant from November to January, and in February and March, almond trees bud white and pink blooms, and bees are brought into orchards to pollinate the trees. Kernels grow to full size from March to June, with a shell hardening around the kernel. The almond hull splits open in July so the kernel can dry. Tree “shakers” harvest the almonds from August to October by shaking the trees so almonds fall to the ground. The almonds dry for 7-10 days in the sun and are then swept up by machines. Finally, the almonds are hulled/shelled in a machine.

Store raw almonds in an airtight container in a cool dry place. If stored properly, they will stay fresh for up to 2 years in the refrigerator or freezer. The high oil content in almonds can oxidize and spoil their flavor. If you slice the almond open and it is yellowish in color or has a honeycomb patter on the inside, the almond is rancid, or spoiled.

Almonds can be eaten raw and plain for a quick snack, easy for on-the-go. They can also be purchased sliced or chopped. Almonds can be added to stir fries, salads, tacos or yogurt. Purchase almonds raw, unroasted, and unsalted to avoid extra salt and sugar. Try roasting almonds yourself to control the amount of salt added and customize spices. Almonds are also available in many forms including milk, nut butter, yogurt and flour, which provide many ways to enjoy the delicious flavor and nutrients of almonds.