



Health Nuts

Walnuts not only taste good, but also offer health benefits. Ellen Drummen-Nijssen from Domaine de Montsalvy in France discusses the history and health benefits of these popular tree nuts.



Walnuts have a rich history. The oldest walnut remains were discovered in Iraq and they are believed to be from 50,000 B.C. The Greeks and Romans were fond of walnuts and considered them food for the Gods. The Romans called them *Juglans regia*, which means Jupiter's royal acorn.

Early history indicates English walnuts come from ancient Persia, where they, unfortunately, were reserved for royalty only. The point of origin for the Persian walnut lies in central Asia, where the trees first grew in a wild state. In pre-historic times, the walnut spread to western China, the Caucasus, Persia and Europe. The last glacial era greatly restricted the extent of Persian walnuts in western Europa, but archaeologists found their remains in southern France, dating back 17,000 years. This makes walnuts the oldest tree food known to man.

The name walnut comes from the Old English *wealhnutu*, *wealh* meaning foreign and *hnutu* meaning nut. It thus has, contrary to what many people think, nothing to do with a wall.

The health benefits

Saying walnuts are a nutritious food is a bit of an understatement. Walnuts provide healthy fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals – and that's just the beginning of how they support health. There's so much interest in this nut that for the past 50 years, scientists have gathered annually at the University of California for a walnut conference, discussing the latest in walnut health research.

Here are 10 science-based health benefits of walnuts. They:

- **Are rich in antioxidants:** more so than any other common nut
- **Are a super plant source of Omega-3S:** higher than any other nut
- **May decrease inflammation:** inflammation is at the root of many diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Type 2 Diabetes and Cancer, and can be caused by oxidative stress. The polyphenols in walnuts can help fight this oxidative stress and inflammation.
- **Promote a healthy gut:** with a healthy gut, you are more likely to have good overall health
- **May reduce the risk of some cancers:** including breast, prostate and colorectal cancers
- **Support weight control:** although calorie dense, the body may not absorb all of the calories in walnuts, so they may help control appetite and hunger
- **May help lower blood pressure:** high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke
- **Support good brain function:** not only do walnuts look like a tiny brain, they also contain nutrients that may protect the brain from inflammation and support good brain function while ageing
- **Improve blood fats:** they may help lower harmful cholesterol and triglyceride levels, which contribute to heart disease risk
- **Support healthy aging:** walnuts may help preserve physical functions, such as walking.

Eating walnuts

So what you can do with walnuts, besides just eating them as they come – enjoying their slightly bitter, but fairly mild flavour? Try baking a walnut loaf, with or without banana, a walnut cake, or mixing them into a carrot or apple cake. Walnuts are great for caramelising or glazing and pair well with a caramelised pear and gorgonzola salad.

The leaves of the walnut tree can be used to make tea, which is exceptionally good for the digestive system, especially the gut. And don't forget the ab-fab walnut oil, which is delicious on almost everything, but especially on arugula salad. Last but not least, walnut wine and walnut liquor are a tempting way to add walnuts into your diet, but consume in moderation, as they are so delicious that it's easy to forget the alcohol percentage can be as high as 35-40%.



Wellness at Domaine de Montsalvy

When we bought Domaine de Montsalvy in 2006, we thought we were buying a domain with holiday homes, a swimming pool and tennis court. We were pleasantly surprised when we discovered its orchard with 75 walnut trees. In addition to these super nuts, there are many herbs and flowers we originally only appreciated for their beauty. We've since discovered they also possess medicinal properties. We started using them for meals, making teas and **extracting essential oils**. We now organise special retreats on Honest Food/Herbal Healing and Wellbeing, adding to our existing theme weeks on Gastronomy and French Cuisine and Wines. Our next Wellbeing retreat is scheduled from 20–27 June. During the week, coaches will share their specialties, such as yoga, breathing techniques and meditation, reiki, foot reflexology and life coaching. The programme can be found on www.domaine-de-montsalvy.com (under 'Topical' and 'Agenda').

