

## A Handful of Walnuts for a Healthier Heart!

Americans are well-accustomed to hearing about the benefits of the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, one that is rich in monounsaturated fats like olive oil and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Well, if the Mediterranean diet is good, recent research suggests that a simple addition of walnuts can make an already good diet even better!

Reported in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* on April 4, 2000, researchers from Loma Linda University in California and the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona revealed that substituting 8 to 11 walnuts a day for some of the fat in the healthy Mediterranean diet can significantly lower total and “bad” LDL cholesterol levels in men and women – even further than the Mediterranean diet alone.

This groundbreaking discovery occurred after 49 men and women between 28 and 72 years of age who had high cholesterol completed a 12-week study at the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona. For six weeks, the study participants followed a typical cholesterol-lowering Mediterranean diet. For another six weeks, they consumed a similar diet where a handful of walnuts replaced approximately 35% of the energy from monounsaturated fat.

As expected, the Mediterranean diet significantly lowered total serum cholesterol and “bad” LDL cholesterol. However, the walnut diet was even better! The walnut diet reduced both total serum cholesterol 4% and “bad” LDL cholesterol 6% *more* than the Mediterranean diet alone. “Good” HDL cholesterol did not change in either diet. Reducing total and LDL cholesterol lowers the risk of heart disease and this study demonstrates that a Mediterranean diet with a daily addition of a handful of walnuts can be a healthy dietary approach to lowering cholesterol levels.

For the majority of Americans that still consume a diet high in saturated fat, the regular addition of a handful of nuts could have even greater cholesterol lowering effects than was seen when compared to the already heart-healthy Mediterranean diet. This study adds further evidence to the growing body of research on the cholesterol-lowering effect of nuts and the value of whole foods in reducing risk of chronic health problems like heart disease. Go *nuts* and try a handful of walnuts for good health!

### *References:*

Personal Interview with Dr. Joan Sabate, Director of Nutrition and Professor, Department of Nutrition, School of Public Health, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA 92350.

Zambon, D, Sabate, J, Munoz, S, et al. Substituting Walnuts for Monounsaturated Fat Improves the Serum Lipid Profile of Hypercholesterolemic Men and Women. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2000; 132:538-536.