Physician's First Watch | *Medical news from NEJM Journal Watch*

Nut Consumption Tied to Reduced Mortality Risk

By Kelly Young

People who regularly eat nuts have a lower mortality risk than people who don't eat nuts, according to an industry-funded, observational study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Researchers assessed the nut consumption of some 75,000 women in the Nurses' Health Study and over 40,000 men in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study via regular food-frequency questionnaires. Participants were followed for up to 30 years.

People who ate nuts once a week had a lower risk for dying during follow-up than people who abstained from nuts (hazard ratio, 0.89). Risks decreased even more as nut consumption increased. In addition, more nut consumption translated to lower risk for dying from cancer and heart disease. The benefits were similar for tree nuts and peanuts.

The authors caution: "Epidemiologic observations establish associations, not causality, and not all findings from observational studies have been confirmed in controlled, randomized clinical trials."

NEJM article (Free abstract)

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Association of Nut Consumption with Total and Cause-Specific Mortality

Ying Bao, M.D., Sc.D., Jiali Han, Ph.D., Frank B. Hu, M.D., Ph.D., Edward L. Giovannucci, M.D., Sc.D., Meir J. Stampfer, M.D., Dr.P.H., Walter C. Willett, M.D., Dr.P.H., and Charles S. Fuchs, M.D., M.P.H.

N Engl J Med 2013; 369:2001-2011 | November 21, 2013 | DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1307352

Background

Increased nut consumption has been associated with a reduced risk of major chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus. However, the association between nut consumption and mortality remains unclear.

Methods

We examined the association between nut consumption and subsequent total and cause-specific mortality among 76,464 women in the Nurses' Health Study (1980–2010) and 42,498 men in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study (1986–2010). Participants with a history of cancer, heart disease, or stroke were excluded. Nut consumption was assessed at baseline and updated every 2 to 4 years.

Results

During 3,038,853 person-years of follow-up, 16,200 women and 11,229 men died. Nut consumption was inversely associated with total mortality among both women and men, after adjustment for other known or suspected risk factors. The pooled multivariate hazard ratios for death among participants who ate nuts, as compared with those who did not, were 0.93 (95% confidence interval [CI], 0.90 to 0.96) for the consumption of nuts less than once per week, 0.89 (95% CI, 0.86 to 0.93) for once per week, 0.87 (95% CI, 0.83 to 0.90) for two to four times per week, 0.85 (95% CI, 0.79 to 0.91) for five or six times per week, and 0.80 (95% CI, 0.73 to 0.86) for seven or more times per week ($P<0.001$ for trend). Significant inverse associations were also observed between nut consumption and deaths due to cancer, heart disease, and respiratory disease.

Conclusions

In two large, independent cohorts of nurses and other health professionals, the frequency of nut consumption was inversely associated with total and cause-specific mortality, independently of other predictors of death.

Funding

Funded by the National Institutes of Health and the International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research and Education Foundation.