

Peanut Butter: A Great Diet Food

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If you've been avoiding the peanut butter to help watch your waistline, think again. Time and time again my clients who skip the Skippy because "it's loaded with fat", are shocked when I tell them it may actually help them to stay trim.

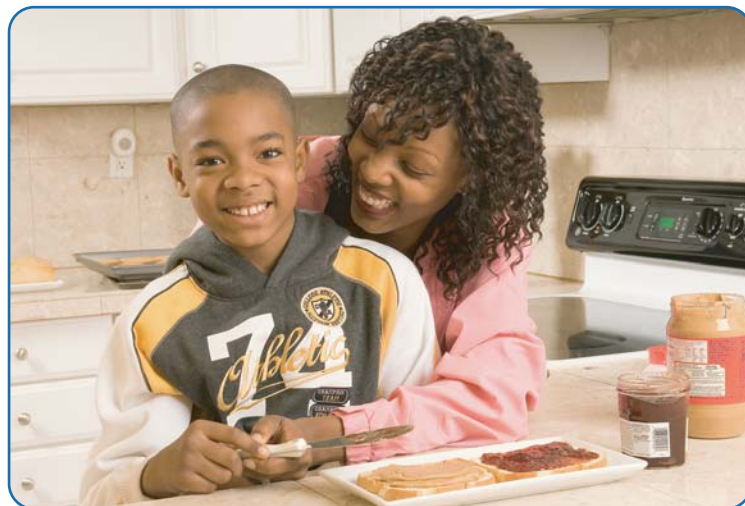
Why is peanut butter so satisfying? Peanut butter's combination of fat, protein and carbohydrate please the palate, and the fat, protein and fiber in peanut butter take longer to digest than a high carbohydrate snack. This means that a modest portion of peanuts or peanut butter will actually keep you feeling fuller longer, so you won't be tempted to snack as soon, and you won't be as hungry at your next meal. This is the secret to how these little legumes can help you control your weight.

Researchers at Purdue University experimented with several different types of snacks to see which ones had the greatest effect in suppressing hunger. Snacks ranged from traditional "diet" foods such as pickles and rice cakes to higher fat foods such as peanuts and peanut butter. The researchers found that the peanut products suppressed hunger for two and a half hours, while similar portions of rice cakes and pickles caused hunger to return in just a half an hour. And snacking on the peanut butter did not lead to weight gain, because the subjects self-adjusted their calories in response to feeling fuller longer.

Other studies, too, have failed to show that eating nuts and nut butters (such as peanut or almond butter) causes weight gain. In fact, the only significant change that has been found in the diets of people who include nuts and nut butters is an improvement in their cholesterol levels and intake of heart healthy fats. This is because peanuts are rich in monounsaturated fats (2 tablespoons of peanut butter has 16 grams of fat, 13 of which are unsaturated) and often replace foods that are high in saturated fat (such as butter, salad dressings and cream cheese).

Moms know a thing or two about the merits of peanut butter—it's a quick and easy source of protein, it lasts forever in the cabinet and is a universal crowd-pleaser. And while moms know that it's good for kids, they may not know that it's good for people of all ages.

A look at the numbers reveals the other benefits of this food. Weighing in at 190 calories per serving (2 tablespoons), peanut butter packs



9 grams of protein, 2 grams of fiber, and is rich in folate, vitamin E, magnesium, phosphorus and several B vitamins. Peanuts are also rich in a phytochemical called phytosterol beta-sisterol, which may help reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. This makes it a healthy snack by any standard.

While the idea of low fat peanut butter has appeal to moms concerned about fat, in reality you're better off sticking with the real deal, as the reduced fat versions are loaded with sugar and contain about the same amount of calories as regular peanut butter.

While the PB&J is one of the most common uses for peanut butter in the American diet, try spreading it on your morning toast or english muffin for a nutrition boost, dip veggie sticks in melted peanut butter as a snack, or nibble on graham crackers spread with creamy or crunchy peanut butter. Swapping the traditional schmear of cream cheese for peanut butter on your bagel, for instance, will save on saturated fat and calories, and you will get a hefty dose of protein and phytochemicals in the bargain.

You'll also skip the cholesterol, as peanut butter boasts zero cholesterol (cholesterol is only found in animal products).