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AFQ & A

BY MATT BRZYCKI

Do pistachios lower the risk of cardiovascular disease?

In one study, 28 subjects were randomly assigned to three diets for a period of four weeks each. All three diets “were rich in fruit, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains” and had the same number of calories (2,100). However, two of the diets emphasized the consumption of pistachios. In one diet, the subjects got 10 percent of their calories from pistachios and in the other diet, the subjects got 20 percent of their calories from pistachios. (The pistachios were eaten as snacks and in a variety of recipes.)

Among other things, the study found that when pistachios were consumed, it resulted in a decrease in total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein. The researchers concluded that when eaten with a “healthy diet,” pistachios have a beneficial effect on the risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Worth noting is that the study was partially funded by the California Pistachio Commission (which is no longer in existence).

In July 2003, the Food and Drug Administration approved this labeling of certain nuts—including pistachios—and nut-containing products: “Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.”



Are the same health and fitness benefits obtained from accumulated exercise as continuous exercise?

For years, it was thought that people needed to engage in exercise that was continuous in order to improve their health and fitness. Then in 1995, the idea was advanced that similar benefits could also be derived by doing several bouts of exercise that are spread throughout the day.

In a recent review of the relevant literature, researchers identified 16 studies that involved 836 subjects. In general, the subjects exercised for 20 to 40 minutes per day, three to five days per week, for a period of four to 20 weeks. Those who were assigned to perform accumulated exercise did two

to four bouts with each bout lasting 10 to 15 minutes.

Most of the studies found no significant difference between equal amounts of accumulated exercise and continuous exercise with respect to improving cardiovascular fitness. There wasn't enough evidence to show that accumulated exercise is as good as continuous exercise in other measures such as body composition and lipid profile.

So there's plenty of scientific evidence that accumulated exercise is just as good as continuous exercise at improving cardiovascular fitness. But more research is needed to determine if this holds true for other markers of health and fitness.

the distances that are completed. Participation in formal activities (such as strength training and aerobic training), informal activities (such as walking, skiing and playing “pick-up games”) and organized sports should be included.

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Why is keeping a food/activity diary important in weight management?

It's beneficial for people to record the specific foods they eat as well as a rough idea of the quantity. One study found that people who used a food/activity diary for at least six days per week lost about twice as much weight in six months as those who didn't use such a diary.

The food/activity diary should track good choices (such as the number of fruits and unsweetened beverages) and bad ones (such as the number of cookies and sweetened beverages). Although calories count, there's no need to literally count calories in the food/activity diary. Individuals should simply be mindful of calories.

Since engaging in an exercise program is also an integral aspect of weight management, it's important to maintain a record of physical activities, too. The types of physical activities should be noted as well as the duration of the activities and, if applicable,