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USDA DATA SHOWS THAT PEANUTS CAN BE MOTHER NATURE'S VITAMIN PILL

December 1, 2004, Albany, GA—A new study from The Pennsylvania State University shows that just one serving of peanuts or peanut butter a day can help children and adults meet requirements for nutrients often lacking in American diets. This data from a United States Department of Agriculture national survey of what people are eating (CSFII 1994-96) shows that peanut butter and peanut eaters had higher intakes of several hard-to-get nutrients compared to those who do not consume peanuts. The paper is published in the December issue of the Journal of the American College of Nutrition.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee has discovered that vitamin A, vitamin E, vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, potassium and fiber, are all lacking in typical American diets. This study shows that eating a daily serving of peanuts or peanut butter can help children and adults meet nutrient needs. Peanut butter and peanut eaters had increased levels of vitamin A, vitamin E, folate, calcium, magnesium, zinc, iron and dietary fiber in their diets. What's more, peanut eaters also had leaner bodies than non-peanut eaters.

Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD, RD, distinguished professor of nutrition, The Pennsylvania State University, and author of the study, says, "Including peanuts and peanut butter daily in a calorie-balanced diet can help consumers achieve important nutrient goals set by the US government." For this reason, peanuts have often been referred to as "Mother Nature's" multi-vitamin.

Vitamin E, which is hard to get from foods, is thought to help prevent heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and dementia. One serving of peanut butter or peanuts contains 18 and 16 percent, respectively, of the Daily Value for vitamin E. One serving of peanuts also contains almost 10 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance for folate, a nutrient important in breaking down the amino acid homocysteine, which in high levels can lead to artery damage and higher risk of heart attack.

Americans are currently consuming only about half of the fiber they need each day. Fiber consumption has been linked to a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. A one-ounce serving of peanuts or a two-tablespoon serving of peanut butter contains about

2 grams of fiber—that’s as much as a slice of whole-wheat bread. So, a peanut butter sandwich on whole-wheat bread gives you six grams of beneficial dietary fiber, compared to a deli sandwich that provides only one or two grams. In addition, low-fat or non-fat milk is a natural pair with a peanut butter sandwich, which may explain why peanut butter and peanut eaters in the study had higher intakes of calcium. Survey data shows that two-thirds of peanut butter sandwiches are eaten with milk.

Intake of magnesium, which may be important in preventing heart disease and type 2 diabetes, was also higher in peanut butter and peanut eaters. This finding confirms a clinical study from Purdue University where subjects who had low blood levels of magnesium were able to bring them up to a normal range within eight weeks by consuming peanuts daily. A one-ounce serving of peanuts or a two-tablespoon serving of peanut butter contains 13 and 14 percent, respectively, of the Daily Value for magnesium.

This study also helps to dispel the myth that higher-fat foods automatically lead to weight gain. The peanut eaters had leaner bodies compared to the non-peanut eaters, as measured by body mass index (BMI), an indicator of body fatness. Peanut eaters also had lower intakes of “bad” saturated fat and cholesterol, and higher intakes of “good” monounsaturated fat and polyunsaturated fat.

The study was funded in part by The Peanut Institute, a non-profit organization that supports nutrition research and develops educational programs to encourage healthful lifestyles. Learn more about peanuts and health at www.peanut-institute.org

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