

# Healthy elders consuming nearly 300 calories of walnuts daily show no negative effects on body weight, composition

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Researchers at Loma Linda University Health found that walnuts can be incorporated into the daily diet of healthy elders without having a negative impact on weight gain or weight management.

Their findings, published September 18 in the journal *Nutrients*, expand the knowledge of how nuts can affect the independently living, predominantly healthy, elderly cohort.

The study's lead author, Edward Bitok, DrPH, MS, RDN, assistant professor at Loma Linda University (LLU) School of Allied Health Professions, said there is a widespread fallacy that the fats in nut cause weight gain, and therefore could lead to issues such as obesity, or other weight-related health issues such as heart disease or diabetes. The research, however, shows that nuts are a healthful snack.

"Because of their high energy content, many

people have believed the misconception that nuts cause unwanted weight gain, and avoid them altogether," Bitok said. "This study helps us understand more about good fats versus bad fats."

The study was titled, "Effects of Long-Term Walnut Supplementation on Body Weight in Free-Living Elderly: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial," and was a sub-study of the Walnuts and Healthy Aging Study (WAHA), the first large study to test if walnuts play a part in healthy aging.

The WAHA study was a two-year trial supported by a grant from by the California Walnut Commission, which tested how daily consumption of walnuts was associated with age-related cognitive decline and macular degeneration in seniors. "We wanted to provide research disproving the idea that the fats in nuts are unhealthy and cause weight-gain," Bitok said. "We conducted this study mainly to determine if subjects eating walnuts were at greater risk of weight gain compared to those who didn't consume walnuts."

Prior studies examining [walnut](#) consumption and body weight have focused on younger individuals and for shorter durations. "Research on long-term intake of walnuts and their effect on body [weight](#) in older adults has been lacking, and we wanted to close that gap," Bitok said.

Bitok, who was a doctoral student at LLU School of Public Health at the time of the study, worked closely with co-author Joan Sabate, MD, DrPH, executive director of the Center for Nutrition, Healthy Lifestyle & Disease Prevention Center at the School of Public Health, and the principal investigator for the WAHA study.

"Our hope was that seniors would be able to include nuts in their diet without concern for [weight](#)

gain," Sabate said. "Indeed, this was demonstrated in the study."

The study looked at 307 participants between the ages of 63 and 79 who were healthy, free-living seniors residing within a 60-mile radius of Loma Linda University. The study began in October 2012 and ended in July 2016.

**More information:** Edward Bitok et al, Effects of Long-Term Walnut Supplementation on Body Weight in Free-Living Elderly: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial, *Nutrients* (2018).  
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