

# the healthy swimmer



Eliana Dullins

## Nuts About Almonds

Almonds are among the world's earliest cultivated foods, but until recently they have also been one of the most misunderstood. Explorers first discovered almonds in Asia, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Considered a delicacy in ancient Egypt and grown as a crop in ancient Greece, the almond was mentioned in biblical writings. Despite their long history, almonds have not always been identified as a health food.

One of the most common misconceptions about the almond is that it is a nut. Although the consumable part of the almond is a nutmeat, the almond is botanically considered a fruit, and related to the peach, apricot and cherry. Almonds grow on trees and look like small oblong peaches with a grayish-green husk.

Almonds have long been considered too high in fat to be a

healthy food, but various studies reported by the American Heart Association and published in the *Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, have uncovered a multitude of potential health benefits. Consumed in moderation, almonds may help lower blood cholesterol, counteract obesity and play a preventive role against chronic diseases such as osteoporosis, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's and certain types of cancer.

Almonds are high in fiber, protein, calcium, magnesium, potassium and vitamin E, and 90 percent of the fat in almonds is unsaturated, a relatively healthy form of fat that is liquid at room temperature. Aside from the nutritional value and potential health benefits, almonds are mildly sweet, crunchy and delicious. <<<

>>> For more information about almonds, visit the California Almond Board web site at [www.almondsarein.com](http://www.almondsarein.com).

## reader recipe

Although almonds should be consumed in small quantities, you can still enjoy big flavor with each serving. Try this simple recipe for a spicy, sweet and nutritious snack.

### Spiced Almonds

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 lb. **unsalted, blanched almonds**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 T **brown sugar**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1/2 T **salt**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1/2 T **ground cumin**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1/2 T **sweet paprika**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Pinch of cayenne**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 T **fresh lime juice**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spread almonds in single layer on a baking sheet. Toast for 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown. While the nuts are cooling, mix brown sugar, salt, cumin, paprika and cayenne. When almonds are cool, drizzle with lime juice, toss to coat, and sprinkle with spice mix. Stir until covered evenly, and return almonds to oven for 5 to 10 minutes. Cool before serving. Serves 8. <<<

**Serving:** 2 ounces; calories per serving, 326; calories from fat per serving, 240

#### >>> DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE OUR READERS WOULD ENJOY?

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## Freshness Labels Benefit Consumers

How fresh is your food? The recent E. coli bacteria outbreak from raw spinach products caused consumers to think more seriously about food quality and freshness. Shoppers are starting to ask more questions about labels and expiration dates. The food industry uses a variety of freshness labels, but what's the difference between "sell by," "best if used by" and other labels?

Most people are surprised to learn the FDA doesn't require freshness and expiration date labels, except for baby food. An "expiration" date is the last date the food should be consumed; after that date, food should be discarded. When a product is labeled with a "pull" or "sell by" date, that's the last date the distributor wants the product sold. Even though foods are often still safe to eat, avoid purchasing foods after the "pull" date.

"Best by" or "best if used by" refer to the distributor's standards for quality and taste. Food can be eaten safely after the date, but might not taste as good. One other label to consider is the "pack" or "packaged" date, which notes when food was processed and packed.

Keep these points in mind. Look for spoilage when buying fresh produce or when using packaged foods. Avoid open packages, and dented or bulging cans. If food has an unusual smell or growth, pitch it. Never taste food that appears spoiled. Many labels now include an 800 hotline for more information. <<<



Justin Horrocks

## Muscle Cramp? Stretch It Out

What should you do when a slight leg twitch suddenly becomes a painful, rock-hard, paralyzed muscle? Cramps are familiar to most athletes, and can range from a slight convulsive movement to intense pain. Most swimmers have experienced muscle cramps, commonly described as involuntary muscle contractions occurring when a muscle or muscle group doesn't relax.

Cramps can occur in any muscle, but the most commonly affected muscles among athletes are the legs, feet, hands, arms and abdomen. With swimmers, leg and foot cramps are particularly common, and they can subside and return several times before going away.

Although many theories exist as to the possible causes, there's little conclusive evidence. The exact cause of cramps is unknown, but they may be possibly related to poor flexibility, fatigue, dehydration or electrolyte depletion. Swimmers are most likely to get cramps during early-season conditioning, at the end of intense exercise or later that night.

Typically, cramps subside without treatment. But there are a few things you can do to facilitate the process. If you get a cramp, immediately stop the activity that appears to be causing it. Slowly stretch the muscle, holding for several seconds until the cramp goes away. As your fitness and conditioning improve, try incorporating more stretching into your routine—and remember to stay well nourished and well hydrated. <<<

## Ten Tips for Foot Health

Approximately 75 to 80 percent of Americans experience foot problems in their lifetime. Although most people don't pay a lot of attention to their feet until there's a problem, the prevalence of foot problems is not surprising considering the foot has 26 bones, 33 joints, 107 ligaments and 19 muscles. In fact, 25 percent of the bones in the human body are in the feet.

Although millions are affected by a wide variety of foot ailments, the general public is largely unaware of the importance of foot health. The American Podiatric Medical Association offers 10 tips to help keep feet healthy:

- Don't ignore foot pain—it's not normal. If the pain persists, see a podiatric physician.
- Inspect your feet regularly. Pay attention to changes in color and temperature of your feet. Look for thick or discolored nails (a sign of developing fungus), and check for cracks or cuts in the skin. Peeling or scaling on the soles of feet could indicate athlete's foot. Any growth on the foot is not considered normal.
- Wash your feet regularly, especially between the toes, and be sure to dry them completely.
- Trim toenails straight across, but not too short. Be careful not to cut nails in corners or on the sides; it can lead to ingrown toenails. Persons with diabetes, poor circulation or heart problems should not treat their own feet because they are more prone to infection.



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- Make sure that your shoes fit properly. Purchase new shoes later in the day when feet tend to be at their largest, and replace worn out shoes as soon as possible.
- Select and wear the right shoe for the activity that you are engaged in (i.e., running shoes for running).
- Alternate shoes—don't wear the same pair of shoes every day.
- Avoid walking barefooted—your feet

will be more prone to injury and infection. At the beach or when wearing sandals, always use sun block on your feet as with the rest of your body.

- Be cautious when using home remedies for foot ailments; self-treatment can often turn a minor problem into a major one.
- If you are a person with diabetes, it is vital that you see a podiatric physician at least once a year for a checkup. <<<