

Sunflower seeds

Looking for a health-promoting snack? Enjoy a handful of mild nutty tasting sunflower seeds with their firm but tender texture to take care of your hunger and get a wealth of nutrition at the same time. Sunflower seeds are available at your local market throughout the year.

Sunflower seeds are the gift of the beautiful sunflower that has rays of petals emanating from its bright yellow, seed-studded center. The flower produces grayish-green or black seeds encased in tear-dropped shaped gray or black shells that oftentimes feature black and white stripes. Since these seeds have a very high oil content, they are one of the main sources of polyunsaturated oil.

Nutrients in Sunflower Seeds 0.25 cup (35.00 grams)	
Nutrient	%Daily Value
vitamin E	61.5%
vitamin B1	34.6%
manganese	34%
copper	31.5%
tryptophan	31.2%
magnesium	28.4%
selenium	26.5%
vitamin B6	23.5%
phosphorus	23.1%

folate

19.8%

Calories (204)

11%

This chart graphically details the %DV that a serving of Sunflower seeds provides for each of the nutrients of which it is a good, very good, or excellent source according to our Food Rating System. Additional information about the amount of these nutrients provided by Sunflower seeds can be found in the [Food Rating System Chart](#). A link that takes you to the In-Depth Nutritional Profile for Sunflower seeds, featuring information over 80 nutrients, can be found under the Food Rating System Chart.

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Health Benefits

Looking for a health-promoting snack? A handful of sunflower seeds will take care of your hunger, while also enhancing your health by supplying significant amounts of vitamin E, magnesium and selenium.

Anti-Inflammatory and Cardiovascular Benefits from Sunflower Seeds' Vitamin E

Sunflower seeds are an excellent source of [vitamin E](#), the body's primary fat-soluble antioxidant. Vitamin E travels throughout the body neutralizing free radicals that would otherwise damage fat-containing structures and molecules, such as cell membranes, brain cells, and cholesterol. By protecting these cellular and molecular components, vitamin E has significant anti-inflammatory effects that result in the reduction of symptoms in asthma, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis, conditions where free radicals and inflammation play a big role. Vitamin E has also been shown to reduce the risk of colon cancer, help decrease the severity and frequency of hot flashes in women going through menopause, and help reduce the development of diabetic complications.

In addition, vitamin E plays an important role in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. Vitamin E is one of the main antioxidants found in cholesterol particles and helps prevent free radicals from oxidizing cholesterol. Only after it has been oxidized is cholesterol able to adhere to blood vessel walls and initiate the process of atherosclerosis, which can lead to blocked arteries, heart attack, or stroke. Getting plenty of vitamin E can significantly reduce the risk of developing atherosclerosis. In fact, studies show that people who get a good amount of vitamin

E are at a much lower risk of dying of a heart attack than people whose dietary intake of vitamin E is marginal or inadequate. Just a quarter-cup of sunflower seeds contains 62% of the daily value for vitamin E.

Sunflower Seeds' Phytosterols Lower Cholesterol

Phytosterols are compounds found in plants that have a chemical structure very similar to cholesterol, and when present in the diet in sufficient amounts, are believed to reduce blood levels of cholesterol, enhance the immune response and decrease risk of certain cancers.

Phytosterols beneficial effects are so dramatic that they have been extracted from soybean, corn, and pine tree oil and added to processed foods, such as "butter"-replacement spreads, which are then touted as cholesterol-lowering "foods." But why settle for an imitation "butter" when Mother Nature's nuts and seeds are a naturally rich source of phytosterols—and cardio-protective fiber, minerals and healthy fats as well?

In a study in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, researchers published the amounts of phytosterols present in nuts and seeds commonly eaten in the United States.

Sesame seeds had the highest total phytosterol content (400-413 mg per 100 grams), and English walnuts and Brazil nuts the lowest (113 mg/100grams and 95 mg/100 grams). (100 grams is equivalent to 3.5 ounces.) Of the nuts and seeds typically consumed as snack foods, sunflower seeds and pistachios were richest in phytosterols (270-289 mg/100 g), followed by pumpkin seeds (265 mg/100 g).

Calm Your Nerves, Muscles and Blood Vessels with Sunflower Seeds' Magnesium

Sunflower seeds are a good source of [magnesium](#). Numerous studies have demonstrated that magnesium helps reduce the severity of asthma, lower high blood pressure, and prevent migraine headaches, as well as reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Magnesium is also necessary for healthy bones and energy production. About two-thirds of the magnesium in the human body is found in our bones. Some helps give bones their physical structure, while the rest is found on the surface of the bone where it is stored for the body to draw upon as needed.

Magnesium counterbalances calcium, thus helping to regulate nerve and muscle tone. In many nerve cells, magnesium serves as Nature's own calcium channel blocker, preventing calcium from rushing into the nerve cell and activating the nerve. By blocking calcium's entry, magnesium keeps our nerves (and the blood vessels and muscles they enervate) relaxed. If our diet provides us with too little magnesium, however, calcium can gain free entry, and the nerve cell can become overactivated, sending too many messages and causing excessive contraction. Insufficient magnesium can thus contribute to high blood pressure, muscle spasms (including spasms of the heart muscle or the spasms of the airways symptomatic of asthma), and migraine headaches, as well as muscle cramps, tension, soreness and fatigue. A quarter cup of sunflower seeds provides 28% of the daily value for magnesium.

Improved Detoxification and Cancer Prevention from Sunflower Seeds' Selenium

Sunflower seeds are also a good source of [selenium](#), a trace mineral that is of fundamental importance to human health. Accumulated evidence from prospective studies, intervention trials and studies on animal models of cancer has suggested a strong inverse correlation between selenium intake and cancer incidence. Selenium has been shown to induce DNA repair and synthesis in damaged cells, to inhibit the proliferation of cancer cells, and to induce their apoptosis, the self-destruct sequence the body uses to eliminate worn out or abnormal cells.

In addition, selenium is incorporated at the active site of many proteins, including *glutathione peroxidase*, which is particularly important for cancer protection. One of the body's most powerful antioxidant enzymes, glutathione peroxidase is used in the liver to detoxify a wide range of potentially harmful molecules. When levels of glutathione peroxidase are too low, these toxic molecules are not disarmed and wreak havoc on any cells with which they come in contact, damaging their cellular DNA and promoting the development of cancer cells. Its selenium richness is another reason that sunflower seeds can make a good snack—one quarter cup will provide you with 27% of the daily value for selenium.

Description

Sunflower seeds are the gift of the beautiful sunflower, a plant with rays of petals emanating from its bright yellow, seed-studded center. The sunflower's Latin scientific name, *Helianthus annuus*, reflects its solar appearance since *helios* is the Greek word for sun, and *anthos* is the Greek word for flower.

The sunflower produces grayish-green or black seeds encased in tear-dropped shaped gray or black shells that oftentimes feature black and white stripes. Since these seeds have a very high oil content, they are one of the main sources used to produce polyunsaturated oil. Shelled sunflower seeds have a mild nutty taste and firm, but tender texture. Their taste is oftentimes compared with the Jerusalem artichoke (not to be confused with the bulb artichoke), another member of the *Helianthus* family.

History

While sunflowers are thought to have originated in Mexico and Peru, they are one of the first plants to ever be cultivated in the United States. They have been used for more than 5,000 years by the Native Americans, who not only used the seeds as a food and an oil source, but also used the flowers, roots and stems for varied purposes including as a dye pigment. The Spanish explorers brought sunflowers back to Europe, and after being first grown in Spain, they were subsequently introduced to other neighboring countries. Currently, sunflower oil is one of the most popular oils in the world. Today, the leading commercial producers of sunflower seeds include the Russian Federation, Peru, Argentina, Spain, France and China.

How to Select and Store

Sunflower seeds are sold either shelled or unshelled and are generally available in prepackaged containers as well as bulk bins. Just as with any other food that you may purchase in the bulk

section, make sure that the bins containing the sunflower seeds are covered and that the store has a good product turnover so as to ensure the seeds' maximal freshness.

When purchasing unshelled seeds, make sure that the shells are not broken or dirty. Additionally, they should be firm and not have a limp texture. When purchasing shelled seeds, avoid those that appear yellowish in color as they have probably gone rancid. In addition, if you are purchasing sunflower seeds from a bulk bin, smell them to ensure that they are still fresh and have not spoiled.

Since sunflower seeds have a high fat content and are prone to rancidity, it is best to store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator. They can also be stored in the freezer since the cold temperature will not greatly affect their texture or flavor.

How to Enjoy

For some of our favorite recipes, click [Recipes](#).

Tips for Preparing Sunflower Seeds:

If you want to remove the shells from unshelled sunflower seeds, there are easier ways to remove the shell than by hand, which requires a lot of diligence and time. The quickest way to shell sunflower seeds is to grind them in a seed mill and then place them in cold water where the shells will float to the top and can be skimmed off with a slotted spoon.

While not as efficient, another alternative for those who don't have seed mills (which is probably the majority of us) is to put a small amount of seeds into the bowl of an electric mixer, pulsing the mixer on and off a few times for a few seconds each time, until the shells separate but not too many seeds are crushed. Then plunge the seeds into cold water as described above to separate them from the shells. However, shelled sunflower seeds are plentiful in the stores so there is no need to go through the trouble unless you have harvested them from your garden.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas:

Add sunflower seeds to your favorite tuna, chicken or turkey salad recipe.

Garnish mixed green salads with sunflower seeds.

Adding sunflower seeds to scrambled eggs will give them a unique taste and texture.

Use fine ground sunflower seeds to dust your meats with in place of flour.

Sprinkle sunflower seeds onto hot and cold cereals.

Individual Concerns

Sunflower seeds are not a commonly allergenic food and are not known to contain measurable amounts of oxalates or purines.

Nutritional Profile

Sunflower seeds are a very good source of vitamin E. In addition, sunflower seeds are a good source of manganese, magnesium, copper, selenium, phosphorus, vitamin B1, vitamin B6 and folate.

For an in-depth nutritional profile click here: [Sunflower seeds](#).

In-Depth Nutritional Profile

In addition to the nutrients highlighted in our ratings chart, an in-depth nutritional profile for [Sunflower seeds](#) is also available. This profile includes information on a full array of nutrients, including carbohydrates, sugar, soluble and insoluble fiber, sodium, vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, amino acids and more.

Introduction to Food Rating System Chart

In order to better help you identify foods that feature a high concentration of nutrients for the calories they contain, we created a Food Rating System. This system allows us to highlight the foods that are especially rich in particular nutrients. The following chart shows the nutrients for which this food is either an excellent, very good, or good source (below the chart you will find a table that explains these qualifications). If a nutrient is not listed in the chart, it does not necessarily mean that the food doesn't contain it. It simply means that the nutrient is not provided in a sufficient amount or concentration to meet our rating criteria. (To view this food's in-depth nutritional profile that includes values for dozens of nutrients - not just the ones rated as excellent, very good, or good - please use the link below the chart.) To read this chart accurately, you'll need to glance up in the top left corner where you will find the name of the food and the serving size we used to calculate the food's nutrient composition. This serving size will tell you how much of the food you need to eat to obtain the amount of nutrients found in the chart. Now, returning to the chart itself, you can look next to the nutrient name in order to find the nutrient amount it offers, the percent Daily Value (DV%) that this amount represents, the nutrient density that we calculated for this food and nutrient, and the rating we established in our rating system. For most of our nutrient ratings, we adopted the government standards for food labeling that are found in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's "Reference Values for Nutrition Labeling." [Read more background information and details of our rating system](#).

Sunflower Seeds				
0.25 cup				
35.00 grams				
204.40 calories				
Nutrient	Amount	DV (%)	Nutrient Density	World's Healthiest Foods Rating
vitamin E	12.31 mg	61.5	5.4	very good
vitamin B1	0.52 mg	34.7	3.1	good
manganese	0.68 mg	34.0	3.0	good

copper	0.63 mg	31.5	2.8	good
tryptophan	0.10 g	31.2	2.8	good
magnesium	113.75 mg	28.4	2.5	good
selenium	18.55 mcg	26.5	2.3	good
vitamin B6	0.47 mg	23.5	2.1	good
phosphorus	231.00 mg	23.1	2.0	good
folate	79.45 mcg	19.9	1.7	good
World's Healthiest Foods Rating	Rule			
excellent	DV \geq 75% OR Density \geq 7.6 AND DV \geq 10%			
very good	DV \geq 50% OR Density \geq 3.4 AND DV \geq 5%			
good	DV \geq 25% OR Density \geq 1.5 AND DV \geq 2.5%			

In-Depth Nutritional Profile for [Sunflower seeds](#)

References

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