-Eating customs

This simple snacking habit could help cut your cholesterol, study finds

It's good news for those who love a nibble between meals

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Snacking on 50g of almonds – about 45 nuts – every day could improve your cholesterol levels, as well as provide a host of other metabolic benefits.

That's according to a recent study from Oregon State University (OSU), published in Nutrition Research. Scientists recruited 77 adults, aged 35–60, to take part in a 12-week clinical trial where they snacked on either 320 calories of almonds or crackers each day. All the participants had metabolic syndrome, which is a group of risk factors for chronic diseases like heart disease or type 2 diabetes. These risk factors include excess belly fat, high blood pressure, high blood sugar and low levels of 'good' (HDL) cholesterol.

Prof Emily Ho, co-author of the study and director of OSU's Linus Pauling Institute, told BBC Science Focus that the almond snackers lowered their cholesterol levels – including LDL cholesterol (the 'bad' cholesterol) – and improved their gut health, with less inflammation and better gut bacteria.

"We didn't see the same benefits in the control group that consumed crackers as their snack," she said.

"The almond snacks didn't result in weight gain – we actually saw a modest decrease in waist circumference – and improved vitamin E status in people, a nutrient that's often limited in the population." Vitamin E is essential for the functioning of various organs, nerves and muscles, and it can reduce blood clotting.

"[Almonds] are a nutrient-dense snack," Ho said, as they're also rich in magnesium, fibre, and polyphenols with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.