NUTS TO YOU!
By Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD, CCE

I had an opportunity to speak with representatives of the California Walnut Board at a recent seminar. They were full of great ideas for including nuts in vegetarian foods. I loved the quote from Albert Einstein they use in their newsletter, as follows: “Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life as much as the evolution of the vegetarian diet.” I also like some of the facts they have gathered:

- Fifteen per cent of college students identify themselves as vegetarian.
- Across the nation, elementary and high school teachers are noting an increase in students identifying themselves as vegetarian.
- The vegetarian category in traditional supermarkets has increased about 31%, which translates to about $166.3 million in sales annually.
- In food service, culinary arts, and nutrition professions, themes of vegetarian articles have shifted from the adequacy of vegetarian diets to therapeutic application and disease prevention aspects of vegetarian diets.

All nuts can be an ingredient in vegetarian planning. Nuts add fiber, provide protein, and, depending on the nut, add various vitamins and minerals as well. Nuts are concentrated sources of fat and calories. The fat in nuts is the “good” kind, the mono- and polyunsaturated type. Since most diets require some fat, ranging from 15% to 30% of total daily calories, good menu planning can include various forms of nuts every day.

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If you’re looking for the nutrition angle of adding nuts to menus, nuts fit into the “meat” category on the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. Rather than meat or eggs, use beans, nuts, and seeds for the protein portion of the meal.

**So, what can you do with nuts?**

1. Add nuts to salad dressings, such as basil walnut vinaigrette, creamy (puréed tofu) salad dressings with almonds, mustard and dill with chopped pine nuts, etc.
2. Add nuts to sandwiches. Chopped walnuts, almonds, peanuts, and pecans add a toasty flavor and extra texture to grilled vegetable sandwiches, falafel, and hummus. Add chopped nuts to smooth peanut, almond, or soy butters to make a crunchy sandwich.
3. Use nuts as a garnish to increase protein, flavor, and texture. Add nuts to bean and rice casseroles, baked potato bars, hot and cold cereal, baking batters, puddings (made with soy or rice milk), or sorbet sundaes.
4. Add nuts to pasta. For example, top tomato-sauced pasta with chopped almonds or pine nuts, creamy-sauced pastas with walnuts or pecans, or toss pasta with olive oil, sautéed garlic, and chopped almonds.
5. Add nuts to sauces. Stir peanut or soy butter into mushroom sauces for a Thai effect; add ground almonds or pine nuts to creamy sauces or pecans or pistachios to fruit sauces.
6. Add nuts to breakfast dishes including baked apples, oatmeal, hot cereals, cold cereals, and muffins.
7. Add nuts to baked goods; for example, mix chopped nuts or nut butters into cookies, muffins, cakes, and pie crusts.

**Nutrition Note:** Roughly 1-1/2 ounces of most nuts or 2 Tablespoons of nut butters have approximately 4 grams of protein or about 8% of the Daily Reference Value for protein. The USDA school lunch program currently allows nuts to account for 50% of the required meat or meat alternate group.

One food service family that decided to go “nuts” is Marilyn and Harry Wedig of Woodstock, Vermont. Their company, Yesterday’s Kitchen, specializes in homemade flavored oils, herbal vinegars, fruit sauces, marmalades, and relishes. Marilyn was formerly a member of the corporate world of IBM and Harry had trained as a professional chef and worked in large food service accounts. They decided they could serve the world and themselves better by doing what they like – cooking home-style foods with the highest quality ingredients. They prepare all their products with fresh ingredients and try to use healthy recipes. Many of their products are vegetarian and are sold at farmers’ markets and specialty food stores. Their top seller is basil pesto walnut oil.

We believe it necessary to say a word about nut allergies. Since some people are extremely allergic to nuts, consideration for them must be made when serving food where a menu will not be read, such as on a buffet or in a college or school dining area. Always be sure to identify dishes with nuts, especially in dishes that are not obviously nut-containers. For example, some commercial veggie burgers use nuts as part of the fat content. Finely chopped nuts as a garnish for a freshly baked blueberry muffin might not be noticeable, either.

We’ve had questions as to whether soy “nuts” are truly nuts. From our understanding, soy nuts are simply roasted soybeans. They do have a nutty flavor and can be substituted where true nuts, such as peanuts or walnuts, are usually used. We cautiously say that those without a soy allergy should be okay with soy nuts. Of course, you’d have to check what type of oil was used to roast the soybeans!
**Commercial Vegetarian Foods That Contain Nuts**

Worthington Foods Natural Touch Veggie Burgers

Hard Rock Café All Natural Veggie Burgers

Amy’s Kitchen Country Dinner Vegetarian Salisbury Steak and Amy’s Veggie Burgers (assorted flavors)

Casa Dilsio Products, including Walnut Pesto Sauce and Frozen Walnut Sauce

Govinda’s Walnut Date Blissbar

Pezzini Farm’s Artichoke Pesto Sauce

Frankly Natural Baker’s Vegan Decadence Mocha Bar

(Source: Walnut Market Board <www.walnut.org>)

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**FOOD SERVICE HOTLINE**

**Question:** I like to offer lots of dips for chips, veggies, and breadsticks when I cater. I usually use sour cream or yogurt as a base. My vegan clients are getting tired of salsa and hummus (garbanzo bean dip). Any suggestions?

**Answer:** Thanks for thinking of your vegan clients during party time. You’re off to a great start. Traditional salsa (tomatoes, chilies, cilantro, onions) is a great dip, marinade, and even a base for hot sauces and soups (add salsa to tomato or vegetable soup for flavor variety). But salsa does not have to be tomato-based only. You can make a citrus salsa with grapefruit and orange segments, chopped onion, cilantro, and chilies. Serve this on its own or add chopped pineapple, mango, fresh peaches, or apricots. You can roast vegetables, such as summer squash and red bell peppers and add this to a tomato salsa. The variations are endless. Ditto for hummus. You can purchase different flavored hummus or make your own. Add pureéd red or yellow pepper, chilies, roasted corn, or tomatoes. Or use black beans or red beans to prepare the hummus instead of garbanzos. (We’ve included some information on commercially available hummus below in the Vegan Food Products section.)

Bean dips are easy to make. Purée cooked beans and add garlic, onions, chilies, lemon juice, parsley, and other seasonings your clients like. You can purchase soy yogurt and soy sour cream and use them rather than dairy products with the recipes you currently use. Puréeed silken tofu mixed with a small amount of lemon juice can also be used as a base for savory dips.

Avocado is a great base for dips. Mash fresh ripe avocados or purchase frozen avocado pulp. Prepare a basic guacamole with mashed avocado, onion, cilantro, garlic, lemon juice, and chili. You can serve this as is or add seasonings such as curry powder and cumin for an Indian flavor, rice vinegar and soy sauce for an Asian style, or fresh shredded basil, chopped sun-dried tomatoes, and pine nuts for an Italian flair.