

# **Educating health professionals as to the health benefits of almond consumption**

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Consumer Insights

Project Number: AL07017

## **AL07017**

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## Final Report

### HAL Project AL07017

# Educating Health Professionals as to the Health Benefits of Almond Consumption

June 2010



ALMOND  
BOARD OF  
AUSTRALIA

HAL Project Number: AL07017

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Purpose of the Research: The Almond Board of Australia has identified that educating Australia’s key health professionals about the significant health benefits of regularly eating almonds is fundamental to growing almond consumption.

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## Media Summary

Over the past three years, the Almond Board of Australia has developed and implemented an educational program for key health professionals concerning the nutritional benefits of eating almonds.

The basis of this educational program has been the nutritional science that shows a strong relationship between eating 30 grams of almonds everyday and improved heart health.

One of the key educational resources developed in this program has been a document outlining the relationship between almond consumption and lowering LDL cholesterol, as this is one of the key bio-markers of heart health.

The major health professional segments included in this educational program have been general practitioners (GP's), dietitians and fitness advisors. The GP's have received specific focus as they are the most influential sector of health professionals. More Australians have contact a GP than any other health professional.

One of the most successful ways of educating these health professionals has been through the development and distribution of the 30 gram heart-shaped almond tin.

These tins have been designed to hold the recommended portion of almonds for a healthy daily diet. They have been embraced by the health professionals involved in our educational activities and they have in turn passed them onto their clients and patients.

While the educational activities of this program have made a positive contribution towards improving the nutritional knowledge of health professionals, a significant amount of work remains.

This is due to the pervasive impact of the 'culture of the low-fat diet' on the perceptions and advice of health professionals. The 1990's nutritional science of advocating 'low-fat diets' for weight loss continues to inform both the nutritional advice of health professionals and the product development by the Australian food industry.

It will be important for the Australian almond industry to continue its educational work surrounding the important nutritional role almonds play in a healthy daily diet, with a particular focus on the healthy fats in almonds.

## Introduction

In 2008, the Almond Board of Australia initiated a project supported by Horticulture Australia Limited to educate key health professionals within Australia as to the health benefits of regularly eating almonds. This educational program has been core to the strategy of growing consumption of Australian almonds.

The situation facing the almond industry is that healthy professionals, in the main, do not overtly recommend that their clients regularly eat almonds. They do not communicate to their clients that eating almonds everyday will assist in lowering their LDL cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease. They do not perceive that eating almonds should be part of a healthy daily diet. Rather, they perceive almonds as being generally healthy, but not important enough to be specifically recommended.

In summary, the Almond Board of Australia has been communicating these key health benefits to Australian health professionals.

The key health professional groups targeted by this educational program have been doctors, with a focus on GP's, as well as dietitians and fitness advisors and instructors.

## Methods and Materials

### 1. Conferences:

One of the key components of this educational program has been the communication of the nutritional benefits of eating almond at key health professional conferences.

In each year of the program, the Almond Board of Australia has participated in a range of important conferences, including:

- GPCE conferences targeting General Practitioners, held annually in Sydney & Melbourne
- annual DAA conferences for Australia's dietitians.



The Almond Board of Australia has also participated in other conferences, such as the Heart Foundation's national bi-annual conference and the Sports Dietitians & Exercise Physiologists' bi-annual conference.

These conferences have been a very effective way to personally communicate the benefits of eating almonds and specifically, and to distribute the 30 gram almond snack tins. These tins are a very important way of reminding health professionals to actively recommend eating a handful of almonds at least five times a week.



Over 800 health professionals who attended the 2010 Sports Dietitians Conference, GPCE Sydney and the DAA Conference have requested a set of our heart-shaped almond tins to give to their clients and patients. With each set of tins a selection of our key educational resources are included. During this 2010 program, almost 10,000 Australians will receive a 30 gram tin of almonds from their doctor or dietitian during the course of their consultation.





## 2. Key Educational Partners:

In order to communicate effectively with GP's, dietitians and fitness advisors, the Almond Board of Australia developed partnerships with Sports Dietitians Australia and the Dietitians Association of Australia.

Sports Dietitians Australia is a key professional body representing dietitians who work with both elite sportspeople as well as with those members of our community who are involved in weekend or social sporting and fitness-related activities. We have worked with Sports Dietitians Australia to develop resources for nutritionists and dietitians throughout Australia to use in understanding the health benefits of eating a handful of almonds at least five times a week. One of these resources has been a document outlining the role of almonds in fuelling fitness for netball.

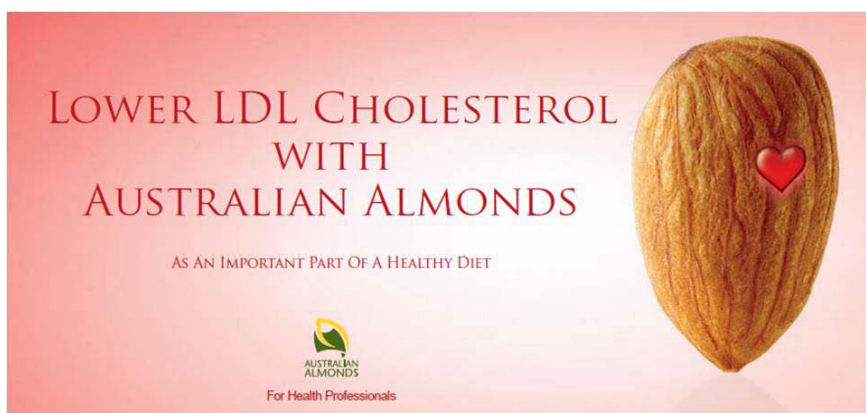
The Almond Board of Australia as complemented the work of SDA by becoming an Associate Partner of the Dietitians Association of Australia. This is the peak professional body for Australia's 4000 accredited dietitians.

We have engaged Sara Grafenauer, an Accredited Practicing Dietitian, to develop our key educational resource: the role of almonds in lowering LDL Cholesterol.

## 3. Key Educational Resources:

Over the three years of the educational program for health professionals, a range of resources have been developed to communicate the important health benefits of eating almonds.

One of the key resources was a brochure outlining the role of almonds in helping to lower LDL cholesterol.



The portfolio of resources includes:

- A brochure outlining the role of almonds in lowering LDL cholesterol and reducing the risk of heart disease
- A fact sheet outlining the role of almonds in healthy weight management
- A fact sheet outlining the role of almonds in a fuelling fitness for netball

**Almonds for Netball**  
Almonds are packed full of goodness and will help keep your body healthy for netball. Almonds contain healthy monounsaturated fats and fibre, making them good for your heart; protein which is great for recovery; the antioxidant vitamin E and other important vitamins and minerals such as potassium, magnesium, iron, phosphorous and riboflavin (vitamin B2).

**FUELLING FITNESS FOR NETBALL**  
Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your game

**MAINTAIN** a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, almonds, wholegrain breads and cereals, legumes, lean meat/chicken fish and dairy foods.

**PREPARE** with a carbohydrate based meal 2-4hrs before your game plus plenty of fluid.

**FUEL UP** with a snack such as yoghurt & almonds, sandwich or fruit 1-2hrs before your game.

**START** your game hydrated and replace fluids at each break and after the game (water or sports drinks).

**RECOVER** by consuming fluid and a combination of carbs and protein within 1 hour of finishing your game such as dried fruit and almonds or a muesli bar.

**CARRY** snacks and fluids with you at all times as food available at venues may not be appropriate. Almonds are a perfect choice! Try mixed with dried fruit, added to fruit muffins, or simply on their own with a piece of fruit.

*The seriously healthy handful.*

**Get Involved**  
Netball is a great sport with competitions for people of all ages and standards. For more information, go to [www.netball.asn.au](http://www.netball.asn.au). For more great sports nutrition information visit [www.sportsdietitians.com](http://www.sportsdietitians.com).  
Authors: Eairy Leach & Lisa Sulphind, Sport Dietitians  
© Sports Dietitians Australia, 2007

**Sports Dietitians AUSTRALIA**

- A fact sheet outlining the role of almonds in fuelling fitness for cricket.
- A fact sheet outlining the role of almonds for healthy growing bodies.

#### 4. Quarterly E-Newsletter:

An important element of our Educating Health Professionals program has been the development of a quarterly E-Newsletter, entitled “The Healthy Handful”.

## Results

The Australian almond industry's 'Educating Health Professionals' program has developed a significant foundation of relationships with over a thousand GP's, dietitians and fitness instructors and advisors.

The effect of these growing relationships can be seen in the 800 health professionals who have requested our almond snack tins to give to their clients and patients. This means that nearly 10,000 Australians who go to see their health professionals will receive one of the Australian almonds' heart-shaped snack tin in their consultation.

One of the reasons for the uptake in this program has been the credibility the Australian almond 'educating health professionals' program has achieved by participating in the GPCE, DAA, SDA and Heart Foundation conferences over the past three years. Credibility is developed through consistency of effort and convincing, science-based nutritional resources.

Another result of the educational program has been the growing willingness of health professionals who contribute to the media to include the health benefits of eating almonds in their articles.

One of Australia's leading dietitians, Catherine Saxelby writes about the value of almonds in a healthy daily diet.

In an article about "Brain Foods", Saxelby identifies almonds as one of ten 'superfoods':

*"AUSTRALIAN senior school and university student have bad dietary habits using snack foods to help them stay up late and study for exams, throwing good nutrition out the window, according to new research. Catherine Saxelby has developed a list of 10 super study foods for students to stock up on to help them get through the exam period....*

*4. Almonds - packed with vitamin E, healthy fats, magnesium and the amino acid arginine for healthy blood vessels; to keep everything flowing smoothly"*

Another example of the results achieved by the Australian almond industry's Educating Health Professionals' program is the newspaper article that highlights the use by a doctor of the almond snack tin as part of a diet to lower cholesterol.

## The right brain foods

AUSTRALIAN senior school and university students have bad dietary habits using snack foods to help them stay up late and study for exams, throwing good nutrition out the window, according to new research. Catherine Saxelby has developed a list of 10 super study foods for students to stock up on to help them get through the exam period.

These good-for-you foods give you the most nutritional "bang for your buck", so are ideal for students and parents alike.

**10 super study foods**

1. Tea – the L-theanine found in tea, makes you feel relaxed yet alert, a fantastic state of mind to stay in the zone and study.
2. Citrus fruits (mandarin, oranges, tangerines) – these foods are packed full of antioxidants, which help boost your immune system to help ward off colds and flu.
3. Green leafy veg (spinach, bok choy, dark salad leaves) – full of vitamins and minerals that are not only good for your general wellbeing, but your eyes as well.
4. Almonds – packed with vitamin E, healthy fats, magnesium and the amino acid arginine for healthy blood vessels; to keep everything flowing smoothly.
5. Yogurt – contains "friendly" bacteria to keep your insides working well.
6. Crusty bread – low Glycaemic Index (GI) for longer lasting energy, wholesome for extra nutrition and carbs for brain fuel.
7. Fish (cooked salmon, sardines, tuna) – contains omega-3 and iodine, which are necessary for brain function and zinc for memory and a strong immune system.
8. Baked beans – low GI for longer energy, carbohydrate for brain fuel. Fibre to make you feel full for longer and for intestinal health.
9. Carrots – beta-carotene (an antioxidant and the orange colour) needed for eyesight (helpful when you're studying) along with fibre and the mineral potassium for nerve function.
10. Red meat (beef, lamb) – best source of iron to keep your blood oxygenated with oxygen and to overcome tiredness.



This article was a feature in the Body & Soul supplement of the News Limited Sunday papers on October 4, 2009.

It chronicles the experience of one of the media company's journalists, Kylie Mangan, who is informed that she has very high cholesterol.

*"As I waited in the doctor's surgery for the results of my annual blood test, the worst I imagined was that my liver was probably in need of a detox. But, to my great shock, it was not my liver I needed to be worried about, but my cholesterol, which clocked in at a dangerous 7.9 millimoles per litre.*

*The average total cholesterol level for Australians is about five to 5.5 millimoles. Doctors like patients to have a total level of four. My doctor was not happy and gave me a stern warning: "You have three months to get your levels down or else we put you on medication." At age 34, I did not want to commit myself to a lifetime of cholesterol-lowering pills, nor did I want to be at risk of dying of a heart attack, so I sought the help of a dietitian. It did not take long for Dr Naras Lapsys, principal consultant at The Body Doctor in Sydney, to pinpoint my problems. Dr Lapsys gave me a new eating and exercise program, rebuilding my diet and lifestyle.*

*Dietitian and author, Catherine Saxelby, says it is much easier to lower your cholesterol through diet these days than it was a decade ago. "Through research and studies, we know of a lot more things that work to either block the absorption of cholesterol or push it out of the system; she says. "Before, we used to concentrate on just cutting out saturated fat.*

*Now [we know that] adding foods such as fibre, nuts and cholesterol-lowering margarine can have a cumulative effect and help people get their cholesterol down:"*

*Kylie made a number of changes to her diet including the foods she snacked on.*

**"What changes did I make?"**

#### **Snacks:**

*Unsalted raw almonds and cashews. It is always hard to stop at just a handful so **Dr Lapsys supplied one with a small tin**, which fitted about 12 nuts (a third of a cup). Once it was empty, I'd had my quota. Raw nuts contain heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and are a protein-rich snack, which made me feel fuller for longer*

...

*Did it work?*

*Yes, after a few months, my total cholesterol dropped from 7.9 to 5.9 millimoles. I still have a way to go (I'm aiming to get it to 5.5), but it was encouraging to know that changing my diet and lifestyle could have an impact on my cholesterol and overall wellbeing. The bonus was that I also lost two kilograms".*

Dr Lapsys has been part of the Australian almonds 'Educating Health Professionals' program and has been requesting and receiving the heart-shaped tins for a couple of years. The article that appeared in the Sunday News Limited papers highlights the effectiveness of this program.

## Health

HIGH-PROTEIN,  
NO-CARB DIETS ARE  
PUTTING PEOPLE AT  
RISK OF DEVELOPING  
HIGH CHOLESTEROL. BY  
Kylie Mangan.

### IS YOUR DIET RAISING YOUR

**A**s I waited in the doctor's surgery for the results of my annual blood test, the worst I imagined was that my liver was probably in need of a detox. But, to my great shock, it was not my liver I needed to be worried about, but my cholesterol, which clocked in at a dangerous 7.9 millimoles per litre. The average total cholesterol level for Australians is about five to 5.5 millimoles. Doctors like patients to have a total level of four. My doctor was not happy and gave me a stern warning: "You have three months to get your levels down or else we put you on medication."



At age 34, I did not want to commit myself to a lifetime of cholesterol-lowering pills, nor did I want to be at risk of dying of a heart attack, so I sought the help of a dietitian. It did not take long for Dr Naras Lapsys, principal consultant at The Body Doctor in Sydney, to pinpoint my problems.

A rundown of my food intake revealed that I was eating 14 eggs a week in an attempt to follow a high-protein diet. "That's a lot of cholesterol a week," said Dr Lapsys.

My lunch was a healthy tuna salad, but by the afternoon I'd abandoned my no-carb regime and resorted to high-sugar, high-trans-fat snacks including muffins, banana bread and yoghurt. After dinner, the snacking continued with chocolate and biscuits. But simply, my diet was high-cholesterol and high-fat with virtually no fibre. I was not eating cereal and rarely reached for a piece of fruit.

Dr Lapsys gave me a new eating and exercise program, rebuilding my diet and lifestyle.

Dietitian and author, Catherine Saxelby, says it is much easier to lower your cholesterol through diet these days than it was a decade ago.

"Through research and studies, we know of a lot more things that work to either block the absorption of cholesterol or push

it out of the system," she says. "Before, we used to concentrate on just cutting out saturated fat.

Now [we know that] adding foods such as fibre, nuts and cholesterol-lowering margarine can have a cumulative effect and help people get their cholesterol down."

Research has shown that soluble fibre binds to bile and helps to pass the bile out of the body. Omega-3, found in oily fish such as sardines, tuna and salmon, has been shown to provide good heart health benefits, as does a handful of nuts each day.

"It's not just about fats alone. All these things add up and if you are diligent and do more exercise you tend to find that the cholesterol comes down," says Saxelby.

## Discussion

The Australian almond 'Educating Health Professionals' program has had positive results in communicating the importance of including almonds in a healthy daily diet.

However, there is a significant task remaining. Some of the key issues include:

- The legacy of the 1990's nutritional science that advocates a high-fat diet as the key to healthy weight; and
- The negative perception of high fat foods.

An example of these issues can be found in the 2010 DAA sponsored Health Weight program. The spokesperson for the DAA offered the following key tips:

### ***Eating better means:***

- Eating at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day
- Eating breakfast
- Choose wholegrain breads and cereals regularly
- Choosing 'reduced' fat dairy foods
- Choosing lean meat
- Limiting high kilojoule and high fat food and drink to once a week or less
- Eating smaller serves
- Drinking water

It is significant that two of the eight tips referred to the importance of reducing fat in your diet. It also grouped all high-fat foods together and advocated their consumption to 'once a week or less'. This type of public health advice is contrary to the nutritional science that advocates a handful of almonds every day.

## Technology Transfer

The progress and insights of the Australian almond 'Educating Health Professionals' program are regularly communicated to the key stakeholders with the almond industry.

The key means for industry communication utilised include:

- Articles and updates in the quarterly Almond industry magazine 'In a Nutshell'
- Presentations and exhibits at the annual Australian Almond Conference
- Presentations and exhibits at the annual Australian Almond Marketing Forum

## Recommendations

Insights from the Australian almond 'Educating Health Professionals' program point to the need to continue communicating the nutritional importance of eating a handful of almonds every day.

While many health professionals have begun to understand the role of almonds in a healthy, daily diet, it is also clear that a significant number do not.

The public health announcements advocating reduced fat diets highlight the need for the Australian almond industry to continue its educational program for key health professionals.

The positive results of the first program indicate that the key elements are effective and need to be progressed. These include participation in the major health professional conferences such as GPCE Sydney and Melbourne; the annual DAA conference and the bi-annual Heart Foundation and SDA conferences.

The resource development by accredited dietitians needs to be continued to ensure that the scientific basis for our educational program remains current and up to date. The key findings from this work will be communicated via printed fact sheets at conferences or by inclusion in the quarterly e-newsletter targeting Health Professionals: 'The Healthy Handful'.

Importantly, continuing to grow the number of Health Professionals who receive our communications and educational materials, and are willing to recommend almonds, giving our heart-shaped almond tins to their clients and patients are key components of our ongoing educational program. These 30 gram tins are very effective educational tools that highlight both the recommended portion (ie a handful) and the major heart health benefit of eating almonds.