

CHOCOLATE COVERED NUT DAY

February 25 is National Chocolate Covered Nut Day. The possible combinations of types of nuts covered by various types of chocolate are endless.

While chocolate covered nuts may seem like an indulgence, both chocolate and nuts have their own health benefits. Nuts are good sources of essential fatty acids and linolenic acids. Most of the fat in nuts is unsaturated, some are monounsaturated, which can improve blood cholesterol, ease inflammation, and improve heart health. Arginine is another substance contained in nuts that may offer the health benefit of increasing flexibility of arteries, which makes them less likely to experience blockage from blood clots. Nuts also contain Vitamins B2 and E, and are rich in protein and fiber.

Dark chocolate is known to contain antioxidants; other health benefits of dark chocolate also include improving blood flow, lowering blood pressure, and even possibly reducing the risk of heart disease.

When selecting dark chocolate, look at the percentage of cocoa as an indication of its bitterness. There are no legal definitions in the U.S. for bitter, semi-sweet, and sweet chocolate. Bittersweet and semi-sweet chocolates are forms of dark chocolate. You can use the percentage as a general indicator of chocolate flavor intensity versus sweetness. The higher the percentage, the more intense and less sweet the chocolate. Dark chocolate labeled 50% will be far sweeter than a 70 to 90% bar. The more cocoa in dark chocolate, the more nutritional value it contains.

Use your discretionary calories wisely. That means having almonds and chocolate in moderation, and instead of other sweets and treats, not in addition to cookies, candy, and desserts. When eaten in moderation, chocolate covered nuts can be an indulgent treat that offers health benefits.

Dipping nuts in chocolate became popular in the 1900's. The first chocolate-covered peanut candy was called Goobers. Goobers went on the market for sale in 1925. "Goober" was commonly used slang for peanut. A famous candy with chocolate covered nuts introduced in 1954, but is still popular today is M & M's. They are covered with a thin candy shell and remain a best seller even today.

There are countless varieties of chocolate covered nuts at supermarkets today. Although the convenience of purchasing store-bought chocolate covered nuts is nice, making your own chocolate-covered nuts is also easy and likely more cost-effective. By merely melting chocolate in a pan, adding the nuts, stirring to coat, and allowing the nuts to cool, you have your own homemade treat.

When choosing which nuts and chocolates to pair, complementary flavors should be selected. For example, pecans, hazelnuts, almonds, and peanuts all have strong, distinct flavors that can pair well with dark chocolate and still maintain the flavor of the nut. Milk chocolate and walnuts pair well together because they each have a medium level of flavor. Macadamia nuts have a very mild flavor and are best paired with white chocolate, so the nutty flavor does not get lost with a strongly flavored chocolate.

To add even more flair to the chocolate covered nuts, a person can add peanut butter, coconut, or even caramel into the mixture when coating the nuts. Sprinkling the chocolate coated nuts with sea salt, sugar, or other spices can also add a new flavor dimension.

Melt chocolate in the microwave by chopping the chocolate into small pieces and place it in a dry microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at 50% power for 1 minute. Remove from the microwave and stir it.

Continue to microwave in 30-second increments, frequently stirring, until the chocolate has fully melted. Too much heat will cause a grainy texture or, worse, burn the chocolate. I also recommend using good-quality chocolate for melting.

Chocoholics, rejoice and celebrate National Chocolate Covered Nuts Day with your favorite chocolate and nut combination!

Chocolate Covered Almonds

Recipe from: <https://dinnerthendessert.com/chocolate-covered-almonds/>

Makes: 8 servings

Ingredients:

- 8 ounces almonds
- 6 ounces semi-sweet chocolate disks
- 1/2 teaspoon flaky sea salt

Instructions:

1. Melt the chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl in 30-second increments.
2. Dip four almonds at a time with a slotted spoon, scrape most of the chocolate off the bottom of them and place onto parchment paper to harden.
3. Sprinkle sea salt over the top and allow the almonds to thoroughly chill in the refrigerator.

(Sources: healthline.com; tasteofhome.com; United States Department of Agriculture)