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Health Nuts: Awesome Almonds make the grade in Groton area

When Ken Lankin was growing up in the 1960s, he would watch the other kids eating the typical peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on white bread and sugary desserts with envy.

His mother, Paula, made sandwiches on brown wheat bread and gave fruit to him and his brother.

Yet today, Lankin gives her credit for being ahead of her time in the nutrition department.

A physician who once worked at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital and the William W. Backus Hospital, Lankin created his own healthy product, Awesome Almonds, while living in Groton.

Because Lankin is also in the Navy and knew he would have to move, he organized the business as a Web site. The company is still incorporated in Connecticut, said Lankin, who is a Connecticut College graduate and currently deployed in Afghanistan as a physician mentor and humanitarian assistance liaison.



Last fall, the CT Specialty Food Association awarded Lankin's orange vanilla almonds with a first place award in the "Outstanding Snack Food" category in its eighth Product Awards Competition. They use natural ingredients for the flavoring, such as beet sugar, orange juice, and vanilla extract.

More than 170 specialty food items from Connecticut-based manufacturers were entered into 19 categories.

Categories included beverages, dairy, gluten-free, organic, pasta sauces, savory condiments, snack foods, and a dozen others. The wide array of products featured fine chocolates, ice cream sauces, pestos, pickles, hot and iced teas, flavored nuts and seeds, seasoned croutons, and more. The previous year,

Lankin's Cinnamon-Vanilla Awesome Almonds won first place in the same category.

Almonds can be celebrated for their heart health benefits this month, which is recognized as American Heart Month. At L&M Hospital last week, people lined up in the lobby to try various types of Mediterranean foods, including eggplant hummus, chickpea and black bean patties, and couscous with vegetables.

“The Mediterranean diet study sent around the world validated the urban legend that nuts were good for us,” said L&M nutritionist Mary Ann Nash, who organized the event.

While Nash said raw almonds would be the healthiest option, eating nuts in any capacity is good choice, especially if they are replacing potato chips and similar snacks.

Almonds, along with other nuts, contain monosaturated fat. They reduce LDL—the bad fat—and raise the HDL, the fighter fat, which protects against heart disease, Nash said. Nuts are also one of the best plant-based sources of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

One study found that having a closed-palm amount of nuts once a day drops cardiovascular risk by 10 percent.

“That’s where the furor started,” Nash said.

Nuts have high-quality, naturally-occurring vitamin E, which has an incredible benefit as an antioxidant, meaning it “destroys the bad guys,” she said.

Almonds also have a protective coating that decreases the body’s ability to absorb the fat, meaning you still have a high level of satisfaction but fewer available calories, Nash said.

The key, however, is to remember that one single food is not the path to good health.

“People get caught up in one food, but it’s truly the Mediterranean lifestyle,” Nash said.

That means a diet based on whole grains, seeds, nuts, fruits, and vegetables with little animal protein, she said.

“To me, it’s the gold standard,” she said.

The more processed food we’ve eaten, we’ve gotten sicker, Nash said, pointing to trans-fats and fructose syrups.

“Think about what your great-great grandmother would eat,” she said.

That sounds like something Ken Lankin’s mother would have approved of.

For more information and a list of retailers where Awesome Almonds are sold, visit www.AwesomeAlmonds.com.