

Fueling the Runner: Yikes! What Happened to My Peanut Butter?

Top reasons to keep this troubled food in your diet

By Jackie Dikos, R.D.

As featured in the Web Only issue of Running Times Magazine

Almost 600 people were recently sickened by contaminated peanut butter products, and at least 8 of them died. Wow, what happened to our peanut butter? This latest incident comes just two years after we were warned about Peter Pan and Great Value Brands being contaminated. Salmonella contamination associated with eating our favorite peanut butter foods has been on the mind of many consumers.

An undeniable small sense of relief was what I felt after receiving an email from PowerBar stating that the peanut butter performance bar I ate the day before was safe. Although the warning is for products made with peanut butter and peanut paste such as cookies, cakes, candies, crackers and ice cream, it is easy to hesitate when spreading a slice of toast with the sticky goodness.

It has been a nerve-wracking couple of years, but we cannot forget the fabulous benefits of this superfood. There aren't many foods out there as quick, easy, and affordable that offer such a nutritional and taste-filled punch. Spread it on a morning bagel. Have it on a sandwich at lunch or as a midday snack. Peanut butter can even make for a savory sauce at dinner time. No matter the time of day, peanut butter is a terrific choice. It works especially well in a runner's diet.

Top Reasons Not to Give Up on Peanut Butter

Keeps you feeling full: Carbohydrates are extremely important for a runner, but carbohydrates alone may leave your stomach rumbling for more during a workout. A tablespoon or two of peanut butter can help you keep your head on the track. It will provide you the energy to feeling more satisfied and energized.

Good source of healthy fat: Peanut butter may raise a red flag on the fat-conscious radar, but remember that it is filled with good mono- and polyunsaturated fats. These are the "good" fats that can raise good cholesterol and lower bad cholesterol and triglycerides.

Good source of various vitamins and minerals: Peanut butter contains folate, vitamin E, niacin, magnesium, iron, selenium, zinc, and more. It offers much more nutritional value than a tablespoon of butter to your morning toast.

Keeps you on the weight-loss course: Enjoy losing weight and still eating what tastes good. Eating peanut butter leaves dieters feeling more satisfied in their food choices and less likely to keep hitting the snack jar throughout the day when portion controlled. This can result in fewer total calories consumed over the course of the day.

Good nutritional balance: Peanut butter offers a great ratio of protein and healthy fat. When combined with other foods, such as a carbohydrate-containing banana or whole-grain bagel, it only adds to the balance of a meal or snack.

Good source of fiber: The fiber content of peanut butter alone is not going to make a huge impact for the Weight Watchers fiber-tracking gurus out there, but it is nevertheless present in this superfood. The couple grams of fiber you get out of each 2-tablespoon serving will still promote a greater sense of fullness and bowel regularity.

Good Source of Protein: Per serving, peanut butter provides 8 muscle-building and -repairing grams of protein. That's not enough to make a serious impact in a runner's diet, but when combined with other healthy protein-containing food choices such as milk or yogurt, it rounds out a meal nicely.

Calorie denseness to aid weight gain or maintenance: While it has been shown to benefit those seeking weight loss, peanut butter can also be used to gain weight. The higher calorie content can be a big advantage to those struggling to keep weight on. By putting an extra thick coating in or on your foods, you can sneak in lots of extra calories, making it an excellent choice for the high energy demands of growing adolescent and high-mileage runners.

It's Cheap: Although Hormel's Spam is climbing the charts during this troublesome economic time, peanut butter remains the more affordable and healthful protein source option. It works perfectly in the dorm room of a penny-pinching collegiate runner or can feed the entire family. With an 18-ounce jar of Jif costing only \$2.79, you can spread that across 16 servings. (Not to mention Spam is much higher in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium.)

Tastes Great: Not many can say with a straight face that they don't like the thick creamy flavor of peanut butter. It can be made sweet, salty, sticky, or chewy. This versatile food is perfect for most any occasion.

Rejuvenate your peanut butter spirit with a personal favorite recipe:

Peanut Butter Protein Crunch Balls

- 1 c. Peanut Butter
- ¼ c. Honey
- 2 ¼ c. Low-Fat Granola or Kashi Golean Crunch Cereal
- ¾ c. Milk Chocolate Chips
- 1 ¼ c. Peanuts, finely chopped

Mix peanut butter, honey, and granola. Drop from a teaspoon onto wax-paper-lined cookie sheet. Freeze for about 20 minutes. Melt chocolate chips. Shape granola mixture into smooth balls. Dip balls in melted chocolate to coat. Roll balls in peanuts. Return to wax-paper-lined cookie sheet. Freeze for 20 minutes or until set. Store in refrigerator up to one week or keep frozen. Recipe makes ~40 balls.

Peanut Butter Balls taste great without the melted chocolate and chopped nuts. For added protein consider adding protein powder to the recipe.

Jackie Dikos is a mother and registered dietitian who lives in Indianapolis. For all of her Fueling the Runner articles visit <http://runningtimes.com/fuel>