

# Activated Almonds? You Must be Nuts!



By Angela Dowden — February 6, 2020

*A new, nutty fad is called "activating nuts," which is described as a laborious process that falls just short of making them germinate. Those involved in this have got to be kidding. What's the motivation behind all this? Angela Dowden explains.*



Are You What You Eat? Image:  
Megapixel [1]

Ever heard of activated nuts? Nope, we're not talking about brazils in tiny training shoes or placard-wielding pecans.

Activating nuts – a laborious process that falls just short of making them germinate – is what we're being urged to do to make these nutritious snacks even better for us.

Except that even though the practice has become de rigueur among health "nuts", there's no proof it has any of the alleged benefits, the main two of which are billed as increased nutritional value and less digestive distress.

You can purchase ready activated nuts, or even "[activated transitional sprouted](#) [2]" nuts if you prefer them by a sillier name, but the internet also abounds with DIY methods for activating them. The process usually involves soaking raw nuts in salted water for anywhere between three to fourteen hours before drying in a dehydrator or very low heat oven for up to 24 hours.

Dig a little deeper into the supposed reasoning behind this strung out palaver and you'll find the

central protagonist is phytic acid (myo-inositol hexakisphosphate), which is the storage form of phosphorus in seeds. Phytic acid binds tightly to important mineral nutrients such as iron and zinc, forming phytates that are largely excreted without being absorbed.

While there's no doubt that excess phytates can contribute to mineral depletion, great progress has been made in breeding the phytates out of commercial crops including corn, barley and soy. In short, phytate-induced mineral deficiency is hardly an issue in the current day American diet.

With activated nuts, the hype goes further: we're led to believe that activation not only improves nutrient bioavailability but also stops the little nutty devils being hard on our stomach, making flatulence and stomach pain less likely.

Ask an activated nut enthusiast why this may be the case and they will talk vaguely about phytates being enzyme inhibitors, but you won't get anything more concrete.

As is often the case there's a germ of truth here – phytates [affect the digestibility of proteins](#) [3] in vitro by inhibiting the protease enzymes that break them down. However there's little evidence that this translates into any real effects in actual nut-noshing human beings. If you suffer gut ache after pigging out on cashews, pistachios or almonds it's much more likely that you have a susceptibility to the oligosaccharides in these nuts (oligosaccharides are a type of FODMAP – fermentable carbohydrate – known for triggering IBS symptoms).

There's another reason why you shouldn't bother with activated nuts, and it's a corker: despite the hype, the process doesn't actually lower levels of phytate by any amount that's worth having at all. A [study](#) [4] at the University of California, Davis found at least 24 hours of soaking almonds at room temperature reduced phytic acid by just 4.75%, from 14.71 to 14.01  $\mu\text{mol/g}$ . And in another [paper](#) [5], activating almonds using a popular internet "recipe" did not reduce phytates at all (In fact phytate measured higher in the soaked rather than standard whole nuts). Nor did it improve gastrointestinal tolerance.

Moreover "antinutrients" like phytates may be more friend than foe, so there's good reason not to try to eliminate them from your diet. Phytates have been put forward as [one of the mechanisms](#) [6] by which fiber may be protective against colon cancer, and they might just be [good for your bones](#) [7] too.

It's also worth noting that all the benefits of nuts that have documented to date relate to good old standard nuts. Plus I'd question if it's particularly safe to soak and dry nuts at home. Having moldy nuts (snigger) is no laughing matter, and if they are still a little bit damp, fungal contamination must surely be a theoretical risk [1]. Give me a big dose of phytates over even a tiny one of aflatoxin-producing aspergillus any day.

In a nutshell? Eat normal nuts – they're perfectly good enough for you that way.

NOTE:

[1] I haven't studied food microbiology since the second year of my degree, so I might be wrong but the idea of soaking nuts and then keeping them at no more than 65C/ 150F for hours and hours as suggested seems like a food safety nightmare to me.

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**Links**

[1] <https://www.megapixel.com/crazy-cuckoo-man-stock-photo-43524993>

[2] [https://thrivemarket.com/p/living-intentions-activated-transitional-sprouted-almonds-unsalted?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=pla\\_smart&utm\\_campaign=Shopping\\_Engagement\\_Smart\\_MeR1fQ7TjG2VJuQPm\\_XQdSdVSpwvrlaf8o4qJdZP0I5TlilKy6L\\_waAo46EALw\\_wcB](https://thrivemarket.com/p/living-intentions-activated-transitional-sprouted-almonds-unsalted?utm_source=google&utm_medium=pla_smart&utm_campaign=Shopping_Engagement_Smart_MeR1fQ7TjG2VJuQPm_XQdSdVSpwvrlaf8o4qJdZP0I5TlilKy6L_waAo46EALw_wcB)

[3] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/phytate>

[4] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29808577>

[5] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28956139>

[6] [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229471466\\_Anti-cancer\\_function\\_of\\_phytic\\_acid](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229471466_Anti-cancer_function_of_phytic_acid)

[7] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30862150>