

## Consumption of bitter apricot kernels presents a health risk

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For some time now the offering for sale of bitter apricot kernels for direct consumption has been growing, particularly on the Internet. In some cases it is claimed that they can help to combat cancer. However, there is no scientific evidence of any therapeutic effect. It is far more the case that the consumption of bitter apricot kernels can lead to severe intoxication which can prove fatal if larger amounts are consumed. Recently the poison information centres of the federal *Laender* received an increased number of enquiries about poisoning linked to bitter apricot kernels.

The toxic effect of bitter apricot kernels can be attributed to the ingredient amygdalin. During digestion hydrocyanic acid (cyanide) is released from amygdalin. Low amounts can poison the body through metabolic processes. The amount of a bitter apricot kernel in an adult can be estimated that is deemed to be safe regarding acute poisoning; it corresponds to roughly half a milligram hydrocyanic acid. The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), therefore, advises consumers not to eat more than one or two apricot kernels per day or to completely forgo their consumption.

In the opinion of BfR the packaging of bitter apricot kernels, which are intended for direct consumption, should carry warnings about possible health risks and recommended intake. Otherwise the products should be considered as unsafe. Misleading advertising claims about medicinal effects are not admissible. Information on therapeutic effects is reserved for medicinal products which must undergo marketing authorisation and provide evidence of their efficacy. In order to protect children from the consumption of larger amounts of bitter apricot kernels, they should only be sold in small packs.

The full version of the BfR Opinion in German is available on [http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/verzehr\\_von\\_bitteren\\_aprikosenkernen\\_ist\\_gesundheitlich\\_bedenklich.pdf](http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/verzehr_von_bitteren_aprikosenkernen_ist_gesundheitlich_bedenklich.pdf)