



Ask the Expert: Benefits of Legumes and Beans

Written by Caroline Parker; Purdue University Dietetics

Beans and legumes may seem common but these two types of foods are special because of the many health benefits they offer. Just like meat, beans and legumes are filled with protein, iron, and zinc. Beans are a type of legume but the term legume includes several other foods like soybeans, split peas, and chickpeas. Legumes and beans contain nutrients that are not in meat, like fiber, folate, and potassium. In addition, legumes and beans are low in saturated fat, sodium, and free of cholesterol. Studies show that eating beans and legumes regularly may help to lower cholesterol so much that some people have been able to control cholesterol without taking cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Along with helping to regulate cholesterol, legumes and beans may help to regulate blood sugar and insulin. Legumes and beans may help to reduce the risk of stroke, depression, and certain types of cancer due to their fiber, folate, and phytate content. Because of these cancer prevention properties, the American Institute for Cancer Research recommends eating legumes and beans with every meal.

Adding more legumes and beans to your daily diet is easy because they fit very well into main and side dishes, sauces, and even desserts. To add more beans into your meals, try adding legumes into salsa, salads, sauces, and soups. Examples of a serving of legumes includes 1/4 cup of hummus, 1/2 cup cooked beans, split peas, lentils, tofu, or tempeh, or a full cup of peas or lentils.

IN THIS ISSUE

Ask the Expert: Benefits of Legumes and Beans	1
Food Safety: Shopping Tips for Beans and Legumes	2
Eating Right: How to Add More Beans and Legumes to Your Meals	3
In the News: Making Crafts With Beans and Legumes	4

Food Safety: Shopping Tips For Beans and Legumes

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1. When buying canned legumes and beans, check the quality of the can. If a can is dented, leaking, or cracked, do not buy it. Also, if a can is dusty, it may mean the can has been sitting on the shelf for a long time, so be sure to check the expiration date.

2. As you put your canned legumes and beans away, practice the "first in, first out" rule. Bring older cans to the front of the pantry, and newer cans to the back.

3. Dried legumes are very inexpensive and last a very long time. Eventually, the vitamins in dried legumes do start to degrade. To slow this process and keep dried legumes longer, store them at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below.



Sources: <https://www.berkeleywellness.com/healthy-eating/food/article/how-buy-beans>, <https://www.attainable-sustainable.net/bulk-food-co-op/>, <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Nutrition-Labeling/Food-Safety-Canned-Foods.aspx>, <http://www.askaprepaper.com/wp-content/>

Black Bean Lentil Tacos

Ingredients (4 servings)

- 4 whole wheat tortillas
- 1/2 cup dry lentils*
- 1 15 oz can black beans*, drained and rinsed
- 1 packet (or 3 tbsp) low sodium taco seasoning
- 1.5 cups water
- Optional: peppers and onions, shredded lettuce, avocado, salsa

* Included in The Emergency Food Assistance Program

1. Cook lentils in 1.5 cups of boiling water over medium-high heat until almost all of the water is absorbed. This takes about 15 minutes.

2. When almost all of the water is gone, add in the black beans and taco seasoning, and continue cooking until all of the water is absorbed. This takes about 2 minutes.

3. Add this filling into your favorite taco recipe, or enjoy it by itself in a tortilla.



Nutrition Facts (per taco)
 Calories: 290
 Protein: 15g
 Carbs: 53g
 Fat: 5g

Sources: <https://www.snap4ct.org/vegetarian-tacos.html>

Eating Right: How to Add More Beans and Legumes to Your Meals

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1. Legume and bean salads can be very versatile.

A beautiful legume and bean salad can be made in minutes using any combination of your favorite legumes and beans. Simply combine the legumes and beans with olive oil and lemon juice, or add your favorite salad dressing. To increase the nutrients in your legume and bean salad, try adding chopped veggies, fruit, or cooked chicken. If you want to add more texture, try adding in chopped celery and nuts. The possibilities of legume and bean salads are endless!

2. Legumes and beans are great in soups.

Making a legume and bean soup is simple. Mix your favorite combination of legumes, beans, and vegetables and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes. Another way to make a soup with legumes and beans is by cooking them with onion and garlic, then using a blender to puree the mixture until it creates a smooth texture.

3. Legumes and beans can be added to main dishes.

The type of protein in legumes and beans compliments the type of protein found in grains so that they form a more complete protein when they are served together. For example, serve brown rice with black beans, or even lentils. Keeping a supply of legumes and beans in your fridge makes it very easy to add them to your favorite meals. Add legumes and beans to your beef stew, pasta sauce, or tacos to enhance the texture and flavor.

4. Add legumes and beans into your desserts.

Legumes and beans may not usually be thought of as an ingredient to desserts; however, both can easily be part of a delicious brownie. Making homemade brownies with beans and legumes can be less expensive than buying a brownie mix from the store.



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In The News: Making Crafts with Beans and Legumes

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Not only are legumes and beans easy to cook with, they can also be used to create unique and inexpensive crafts. Making crafts with legumes and beans is a great way to keep your kids entertained and to save money.

How to make a Legume and Bean Mosaic Model

1. Print out a pattern of anything you want: animals, cars, and even food.
2. Cut a piece of cardboard to match the size of the paper with the printed pattern, and glue the paper onto the cardboard cutout.
3. Spread glue onto a small area of the pattern on the paper, and start tracing the pattern with the dried beans and legumes of your choosing. Continue adding glue and the legumes and beans until the outline and inside of the picture is covered.

