

This issue of *BeanBriefs* is a publication of the U.S. Dry Bean Council's Health & Promotion Committee.



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BeanBriefs

Research / Update / Analysis

The Delicious Nutritious Bean is...

- Fat Free
- Cholesterol Free
- High in Folate
- High Fiber
- High Resistant Starch
- Low Glycemic Index
Low Glycemic Load
- High in Complex Carbohydrates
- Moderate Calories
- Good Protein Source
- Rich in Antioxidants

Beans are a vegetable!

Despite the fact that the American Cancer Society, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 and nutritionists classify beans as vegetables, a recent survey found that less than half of consumers polled consider beans a vegetable.



U.S. Government and Health Organizations Promote Bean Consumption

- The **Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005** and **MyPyramid** identify beans as part of both the meat and beans group and the vegetable group. Beans, excellent sources of protein, can serve as a meat substitute (1/2 cup of cooked dry or canned beans = 2 ounces lean meat) or as a vegetable (1/2 cup = 1 serving).
- The **Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005** emphasize the importance of beans in a healthful diet and recommend an adult intake of 3 cups of legumes, such as beans, each week. This quantity is more than three times the amount adult Americans typically consume today. While children's suggested intakes of beans vary with age, even at the lowest daily-calorie intake (1,000 calories), guidelines include a half-cup of beans for a vegetable serving, plus 3-4 half-cup bean servings as a protein source, per week.
- Also in 2005, bean food processors began adding a dietary guidance message to their food labels about the health benefits of beans: ***Diets including beans may reduce your risk of heart disease and certain cancers.*** While a dietary message is not a health claim, it is a recognized statement that encourages consumers to eat more healthfully and to make better food choices that promote good health.
- The **Produce for Better Health Foundation** includes beans as a vegetable to eat more of in order to improve the health of Americans.
- The **American Cancer Society's (ACS) 2006 Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention** point out that vegetables (including legumes) contain numbers of potentially beneficial vitamins, minerals, fiber, carotenoids, and other bioactive substances (flavonoids, terpenes, sterols, indoles, phenols) that may help prevent cancer. The ACS recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day and also choosing beans as an alternative to meat.
- For the prevention of cardiovascular disease, the **American Heart Association** recommends 4-5 servings a week of nuts, seeds, and legumes, such as beans.
- The **American Diabetes Association** advocates eating more servings (6-11 a day) of grains, beans and starchy vegetables than of any of the other foods in the Diabetes Food Pyramid.



What's Cookin'?

Soaking and Cooking Beans

Dry beans can be cooked without soaking, but soaking helps soften and reconstitute the beans, reduces cooking time, and enhances beans' digestibility.

Beans will re-hydrate to at least 2-3 times their dry sizes, so start with a large enough pot. Add 10 cups cold water for each pound of beans. Bring the water to boiling and simmer beans 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat, cover the pot and let stand. While a 4-hour soak is ideal, beans may be soaked 1-24 hours. Drain off the water and rinse the beans. Start with fresh water before cooking.

A longer soaking time (up to 4 hours) allows a greater amount of gas-causing properties to dissolve in the water and improves beans' digestibility. Soaking and then discarding the water, then soaking again, also helps.

After soaking, simmer beans in fresh water for about two hours, or until tender, adding additional water if needed. Add seasonings during cooking.

- A tablespoon of oil or butter added during cooking reduces foaming and boil-overs.
- To prevent split skins, simmer and stir beans gently. Avoid over-cooking.
- Increase soaking and cooking times in hard-water or high-altitude areas.
- Because acidic ingredients can prevent beans from tenderizing, be sure to add these ingredients after the beans are fully cooked and tender: lemon juice, vinegar, tomatoes, chili sauce, ketchup, molasses or wine.
- Also add salt at the end of cooking for the most tender beans.

Canned Beans—to rinse, or not?

Many recipes call for draining and rinsing canned beans before using them in recipes. This preparation method results in "clear" beans, because the canning liquid often includes some of the bean solids, creating a more opaque "sauce" appearance. Still, when using beans in soups, sauces, casseroles, etc., you can skip the draining and rinsing and, instead, use the canning liquid as a substitute for equal amounts of water called for in recipes. But, when using canned beans in salads and other dishes in which a clear appearance is key to presentation, first rinse and drain the canned beans. Also, rinsing canned beans removes up to 40% of the sodium that was added in the canning process.



Easy Recipe Tips

- *Encourage a sense of adventure by offering crowd-pleasing ethnic menu items, such as hummus and bean dips served with whole-grain crackers or whole-grain pita and raw vegetables as a main, meatless dish.*
- *Choose different bean varieties to mix up your meals' colors and textures — kidney beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, navy beans, red beans and pinto beans. All types have similar nutrient-rich profiles.*
- *Add pureed beans to tomato-based sauces for pizza, spaghetti and lasagna, or use as a texture-rich meat extender in beef patties, meatloaf and meatballs. Pureed beans also add texture and richness to lower-fat soups, stews and other cooked dishes.*
- *Lighten up baked goods. Incorporate beans as low-fat substitutions and thickeners for a significant portion of flour, sugar and oil. Beans easily combine with more-familiar ingredients for delicious, texture-rich cookies, brownies and cakes with lower fat, sugar, cholesterol and calorie counts.*

Need more details on the link between beans and good health and practical information about cooking and consuming beans..? Check out the following Web sites or contact:

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www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines
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