

NUTRITION



FACT SHEET

Beans: A Very Powerful Vegetable

Beans are a vegetable that provide a unique combination of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. On top of that, research has shown that diets including beans may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. So it's no wonder the latest government dietary guidelines say Americans need to eat more beans. Read on to learn more about the benefits of beans and how you can easily incorporate beans into your diet.

Recent Praise for Beans

Beans have long been known as a healthy food. But recently, beans have received increased attention from both the federal government and research scientists as a food that can play a significant role in a healthy diet.

- The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans developed by the United States Department of Agriculture recommends that Americans eat three cups of beans a week. This represents a three-fold increase over the current average consumption of one cup a week.
- MyPyramid, the USDA's recommended eating plan for Americans, lists beans in *two* food groups—in the Vegetable Group because they're a plant-based food that provide vitamins and minerals, and in the Meat and Beans Group because they're a good source of protein.
- In addition, researchers have found that diets including beans may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. So, for people who have a family history of these diseases, beans are an especially smart choice.

What Makes Beans So Healthy?

Beans truly are a super food. They contain a bundle of nutrients that play a role in helping your body stay healthy and fight disease. Each tiny bean

contains a powerful combination of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Consider these facts:

- Beans are a good source of the protein your body needs. Plus, unlike many other protein sources, beans are low in fat, saturated fat free and cholesterol free. This makes beans a great choice for vegetarians, as well as for people trying to cut back on their intake of higher-fat meat products.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many people are surprised to learn that beans are actually a vegetable. In a recent survey, only 43% of Americans correctly identified beans as a vegetable, while 96% knew broccoli was a vegetable! Like other vegetables, beans are a plant-based food that provide vitamins and minerals. But unlike other vegetables, beans are also a good source of protein. Plus, beans have more fiber per serving than any other vegetable.

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Beans: A Very Powerful Vegetable (continued)

- Beans are an excellent source of fiber. One serving of beans provides 20% or more of your daily fiber needs. Fiber has many benefits, such as helping you feel full after a meal, helping maintain blood sugar levels and helping maintain regularity.
- Beans are a good source of vitamins and minerals such as folate, potassium, iron and magnesium. Research in both adults and children has shown that people who eat beans get more of these key nutrients in their diets than people who do not eat beans.

Getting 3 Cups a Week is Easy

If you want to include more beans in your diet, start by keeping a variety of beans on hand in your pantry. Then get creative and try using beans in new and different ways. If you are trying to limit your sodium intake, just drain and rinse canned beans before using them. This will reduce the sodium content by about 40%. Or, prepare dry bagged beans without adding any salt.

Here are some simple, delicious ideas for using beans to boost the nutritional content of your meals:

- Top your salad with garbanzo beans or kidney beans.
- Add black beans to store-bought salsa to create a tasty black bean salsa.
- Stir a can of pinto beans into pasta sauce and serve over whole wheat pasta.

BEAN & CRISPY NOODLE SALAD

Serves 4

- 1 (16 oz.) can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- ¼ cup honey mustard salad dressing
- 4 cups chopped romaine (about 1 head)
- 1 cup chow mein noodles
- ⅔ cup mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 green onion, chopped

Toss all ingredients together in a large mixing bowl. Serve immediately.

Per Serving: 223 calories; 7 g fat; 1 g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 222 mg sodium; 35 g carbohydrates; 7 g dietary fiber; 12 g sugars; 7 g protein; 368 mcg vitamin A; 25 mg vitamin C; 100 mg calcium; 2 mg iron; 93 mcg folate; 375 mg potassium

- Heat up some baked beans—a perfect vegetable alongside beef, pork, chicken or fish.
- Sauté black beans with your choice of vegetables, top with cheese, then wrap in a soft tortilla.
- Make your own refried beans. Just sauté some onion and garlic, add pinto beans, and mash with a fork or potato masher.

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