

## **The Power of Beans- Brandi Propas, R.D.**

“Beans, beans, good for the heart, the more you eat the more you....” We’ve all heard this rhyme in the schoolyards and years ago were probably guilty of singing it ourselves. Yet there is a lot of truth to this childhood rhyme and as adults we need to pay more attention to its message. The bottom line is beans *are* good for our hearts and, as research shows, beans also have numerous other health benefits; however, many of us continue to avoid including beans as part of our regular diet.

So, why are beans good for us? Beans are high in fibre. One type of fibre contained in beans, insoluble fibre, can help decrease constipation. The human body cannot digest insoluble fibre so it passes quickly through our digestive system absorbing water and clearing out waste along the way. The result is a heavier, bulkier stool and reduced incidence of constipation.

Beans also contain another type of fibre, soluble fibre. Soluble fibre does breakdown in our digestive system and forms a gel-like substance. This gel-like substance traps some of the material related to high cholesterol, thereby reducing the absorption of cholesterol into the bloodstream. Soluble fibre has also been shown to help stabilize blood glucose levels, a benefit for people with diabetes.

Fibre can also be a helpful tool for people trying to lose weight. Soluble fibre slows the digestion of food; this means that you will feel fuller for longer. And appetite is easier to control on a fuller, more satisfied stomach.

The benefits of beans don’t end here. One type of bean, soybeans, contain compounds called isoflavones, which have been shown to have an effect on reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and some types of cancers such as prostate cancer. Try using tofu instead of chicken in a stir fry or having edamame (soy beans still in the pod) as a snack to increase the amount of isoflavones in your diet.

Beans can cause abdominal discomfort and gas in some people but adding beans slowly to your diet can help minimize these effects. After a few weeks of regular bean intake your body will adjust. Increasing your water intake is also important when increasing fibre intake.

Concerned that beans take too long to prepare? Buy canned beans. Canned beans just need to be drained and rinsed and they are ready to use and still have the same health benefits as dried beans. There should be no excuses; whether it’s lima beans, fava beans, garbanzo beans, kidney beans, white beans, cowpeas, black-eyed peas, navy beans, soybeans, black beans or lentils, you should add beans to your diet.

Listen to the kids in the schoolyard and include beans as part of your regular diet. Your heart will thank you.

**Here are some easy tips for incorporating beans into your diet:**

- Cook one meatless meal per week; use beans as a substitute for meat
- Add your favourite bean to tossed salad
- Add beans to vegetable soup
- Add beans to pasta and casserole dishes
- Add lentils to rice
- Try hummus for a snack
- Replace half of the meat in chili with kidney beans
- Use black beans in tacos or burritos

**Recipe: Easy Corn and Bean Salad**

Ingredients: Salad

1 can black beans, rinsed and drained  
1 can corn kernels, drained or 350 mL frozen corn kernels, thawed  
1 cup chopped tomatoes  
½ cup each chopped green and red bell peppers  
½ cup chopped red onion  
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

Ingredients: Dressing

2 tbsp red wine or balsamic vinegar  
2 tbsp olive oil  
½ tsp ground cumin  
½ tsp minced garlic  
½ tsp hot pepper sauce (optional)  
Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions:

1. In large bowl, combine all the salad ingredients. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients. Blend well. Pour over salad.
3. For best flavour, make salad at least 4 hours before serving to allow flavours to blend. Salad will keep for up to 3 days in the fridge.

Recipe adapted from: Great Food Fast, Dietitians of Canada.