

Do you know beans?

Quick quiz: what food is an excellent source of protein, dietary fiber, minerals and anti-oxidants; is one of the most inexpensive foods available; stores well for months or even years; and is an important part of cuisine and cooking around the world?

Answer: Beans! Read on to find out more about this amazing food and how to use it.

What is a bean? Beans and peas are the mature, edible seeds of some legumes. They include kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, garbanzo beans (or chickpeas), lima beans, black-eyed peas, split peas and lentils. Green peas and green beans aren't included since they don't have the same nutritional value.

Why should I eat beans? Beans are a key source of plant-based **protein**, they provide **dietary fiber** (one-half cup has 6 grams, about a quarter of your daily need), **minerals** (iron, zinc, folate, potassium), and **anti-oxidants** (in general, the deeper the color of the beans' skins, the more antioxidants they offer.)

How much should I eat? If you eat animal as well as plant proteins, the US Dietary Guidelines suggest eating about 1½ cups per week. For people following vegetarian or vegan diets, the recommendation is 4 cups per week.

How do you prepare beans? Dried beans are sold in 1 pound bags in the grocery store, and often are found in bulk in natural food stores. Most varieties of dried

beans require soaking and several hours of cooking. To save time, cook a lot at once and freeze what you don't use. Or look in your grocery store for canned, frozen or refrigerated cooked beans.

What about sodium? Canned beans are usually high in sodium. Look for low-sodium products, or drain and rinse canned beans to reduce the sodium.

What about digesting beans? A carbohydrate in beans ferments in the gut because the body lacks the enzyme to digest it. The problem may be worse if you suddenly start eating a lot of beans. To avoid gas, try phasing in beans, starting with just a tablespoon a day, or start with the "gentle lentil" or white kidney beans (cannellini). Or try Beano or similar products; they contain a bean-digesting enzyme.

What can I do with them? Bean-based foods and dishes are found in Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, African, Mediterranean, Latin American and North American cooking. You'll find dips and spreads, salads, chilis and soups, pasta sauces, casseroles, refried beans, whole bean snacks, and more! Look at www.stepaheadprogram.com; www.eatingwell.com, www.meatlessmondays.com, www.bushbeans.com, www.foodnetwork.com, among many resources.

Adapted from Inside the new Dietary Guidelines: Beans, Lean and Fit Newsletter, www.washingtonpost.com, April 26, 2011 by Jennifer LaRue Huget

Recipe of the Week: Pasta e Fagioli (pasta with beans)

serves 4 – adapted from www.foodnetwork.com

1 small onion, chopped
2 Tbsp. olive oil
2-3 large cloves garlic, minced
1/8 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes
1 can diced tomatoes, save juice
1 can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
½ teaspoon oregano
1 Tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
ground black pepper
½ pound whole wheat pasta, cooked
juice from tomatoes and broth if desired

1. In a large frying pan or saucepan, heat oil. Add onion. Cook over medium-low heat a minutes, till soft.
2. Add garlic and hot pepper flakes and cook a few minutes. Add tomatoes, parsley, oregano and pepper. Cook five minutes.
3. Add beans and cook gently another two to three minutes. Mix with pasta. Serve with grated parmesan if desired. If you prefer a soup, add the juice from the tomatoes and additional broth if desired.

Nutrition facts:

Calories: 430	Total fat: 8g	Saturated fat: 1g
Carbohydrates: 75g	Dietary fiber: 12g	Protein: 20g

Tip of the Week:

Try walking poles! Walking poles can add intensity to your workout, help maintain good posture and improve your balance and stability. Also, walking poles take some of the weight off the lower back, hips and knees which may help people with arthritis or back problems.

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