



Diabetes
New Zealand

A guide to beans, lentils, legumes and pulses

A legume, sometimes known as a pulse, is the edible seed of pod-bearing plants such as beans, peas and lentils. Most of us are familiar with beans like broad beans, runner beans, bean sprouts, and of course baked beans. However, some other legumes are less well known. New Zealand registered dietitian **Alison Pask** tells us about health benefits of legumes that we can't afford to ignore.

Legumes have great nutritional value: they are full of fibre, low in fat, and a good source of protein.

They are a staple food in many countries - lentils in India, chickpeas in the Middle East and pinto beans in Mexico. And legumes are the main source of protein for people who don't eat meat.

Research indicates legumes may help to reduce cholesterol levels, prevent heart disease, control blood glucose levels in people with diabetes and prevent some cancers. These benefits are likely to be due to the high soluble fibre content found naturally in legumes.

The great news is that legumes have a low glycaemic index (GI) and are absorbed slowly over a long period of time. Therefore they will not produce high blood glucose levels unless you eat too many.

The New Zealand Food Guidelines recommend eating 4-5 serves of legumes a week to improve our health. A serve, for example, is considered to be 1 cup of cooked beans, peas, lentils or tofu.

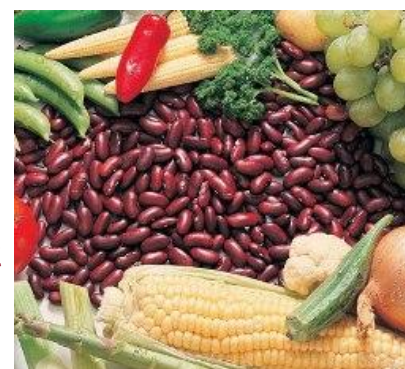
Counting carbohydrate

Legumes are rich in carbohydrates. If you are counting your carbohydrate intake, you therefore must include legumes when you have them as part of a meal.

One 15g portion is equal to:

- A quarter of a cup of baked beans, or
- One cup of broad beans, or
- Half a cup of cooked canned chickpeas.

Legumes will not produce high blood glucose levels unless you eat too many



Cooking legumes

Legumes are available dried or pre-cooked in cans. Dried beans do take longer to cook, so soaking beans first is an important step as it helps to soften the outer skins so they can cook more efficiently.

It's a good idea to soak beans in plenty of water overnight; they will absorb twice their own weight of water. You can cook lentils and split peas without soaking.

Follow your recipe or the instructions on the package, as the cooking time will be different for each type of legume. They are cooked when you can squash them easily between your fingers. If you add salt, do this at the end of the cooking, otherwise it will make the skins tough.

Red kidney beans can be poisonous if not cooked properly, so if you are using these make sure you discard the water you have soaked them in and boil them for the recommended time in fresh water.

Once cooked, legumes will last in the fridge for up to one week. Beans freeze well and will keep in the freezer for up to six months.

Beans are an inexpensive food and therefore are a great way to make a meal go further.

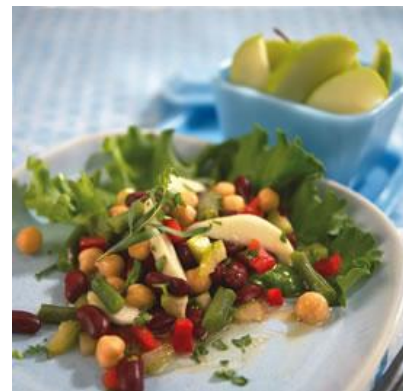
Ideas for using legumes

- Add legumes to mince or a casserole for extra flavour
- Lentils and beans can be bland but they are great at absorbing spicy flavours like chilli and curry
- Canned beans also come in flavoured sauces such as BBQ and Chilli, so will add delicious flavours to your meals
- You can hide mashed beans in meals and only you will know they are there - fussy children or those who refuse to eat beans will have no idea they are eating them.

Use beans in a wide range of recipes

- Hummus - this is a creamy dip made from chickpeas. It's great on toast or sandwiches in place of other high fat spreads. To ensure it's low in fat, mix mashed beans with cottage cheese and spices.
- Bean salad, for example three-bean salad.
- Lentil patties for burgers.
- During cold weather, think about adding lentils or split peas to casseroles or soups. Minestrone or ham and pea soups, if using low fat ingredients, can be filling meals by themselves.
- Nachos are a great way to introduce beans, but be aware that the topping you choose, for example, cheese, sour cream or avocado, could pile on fat and energy.

Use beans in salads or add to soups



Flatulence can be a problem

Beans are not digested in the small intestine. They pass on to the large intestine where they are fermented by bacteria and form carbon dioxide, hydrogen and sometimes methane. This means some people may get flatulence after eating beans.

If this is a problem, soak the beans well before cooking, throw away the soaking water and cook them thoroughly. A gradual increase of beans on the menu will help your body get accustomed to the extra gas production over time.

Give legumes a go

- Find some delicious recipes that add extra interest and variety to your meals
- Go for a walk to the library and get out a recipe book using beans and other legumes
- Or download recipes from websites - see the great chickpea and spinach curry on www.diabetes.org.nz