

What's Good To Eat?!

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HEALTHY
LIVING

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Nutrition Matters

The Benefits of Beans

January brings the start of a new year, a fresh beginning and a time to focus on what is important to us. Food provides a way to support both physical and emotional health while making connections to our families, friends, and communities. Cultures around the world celebrate with communal meals and certain foods during this time of year. One example is Hoppin' John aka Carolina Peas- a traditional Southern dish of black eyed peas that is thought to bring good luck for the year. This tradition may have originated with the



peas symbolizing coins and leafy greens standing in for paper money to increase the prosperity of the dish. Black eyed peas cook relatively quickly and can be used in most recipes calling for beans. See the recipe at the end of the newsletter for one way to try them out.

Beans have a central role in nearly every food culture around the world, yet have lost their place on most American's plates. The average intake is about one serving per week – only 1/2 cup of cooked beans. Studies indicate that increasing our consumption of beans could improve our health in a myriad of ways.

The Health benefits of beans:

Beans are nearly a complete food – they are at home in the starch, protein, and vegetable food groups. They supply a wide array of essential vitamins and minerals as well as protein, complex carbohydrates, fiber, and phytochemicals. They are an excellent plant based protein source: 1 1/2 cups provides as much protein as a 3oz serving of meat. Due to this nutrient density, research indicates that regular consumption of beans can:

- Reduce risk of cancer, diabetes and heart disease
- Aid in weight loss
- Lower cholesterol, triglycerides and blood sugar
- Improve intestinal health

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The Benefits of Beans – Cont. –

How do these little morsels have such a big health impact?

- Soluble fiber: multiple studies have found that about 10 grams of soluble fiber a day—the amount in 1/2 to 1 cup of navy beans—reduces LDL cholesterol by about 10 percent.
- Complex carbohydrates: beans help to slow down the digestion and absorption of food, allowing the liver to control blood sugars without spikes and dips.
- Microbiome superfood: beans provide nutrients for the healthy bacteria living in our colons. These microscopic creatures influence most of our basic biological processes: immunity, appetite, mood, metabolism, and heart health to name a few. The food we eat determines the health of our bacterial colony, and subsequently the health of our bodies and minds.

How much should you eat? Aim for at least 3 cups per week for reduction of chronic disease risk and improved intestinal health. We often hear about the foods we shouldn't eat, but beans are an example of a food we should eat more of. So pick up a can (watch the sodium) and toss them into your dinner. They work as a base for a healthy bowl, a side dish, or an addition to pasta, soups and stews. Try cooking dried beans to save some money and increase the flavor. Soaking overnight will decrease the cooking time but isn't required.

What's Fresh?

Hoppin' John with Greens

Boil 1 cup of dried black eyed peas in water to cover with a quartered onion and a glug of olive oil for 30-45 minutes (depending on the age of your beans). You can cut the cooking time by 1/2 with an overnight soak. In the last five minutes of cooking add 1/2 teaspoon of salt. The beans should be tender but not mushy. Drain the beans and add 1 teaspoon cumin and 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional).



Sautee a diced onion on medium heat until soft in 1 tablespoon oil, add 1 bunch of stemmed kale or chard and cook for 10 minutes or until tender. Squeeze a little lemon juice on after they are cooked. Combine with the beans and serve.

News Bites

A recent review of studies on the health impact of beans highlights the benefits of daily consumption of this nutrient dense food. Published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, the authors reviewed 21 randomized controlled trials lasting at least 3 weeks with more than 900 participants. They report eating one serving of beans per day significantly reduced body weight independent of calories. This means that participants who ate beans weighed less even though they consumed the same amount of calories per day. Calorie restriction isn't the simple weight loss answer it has been made out to be; the quality of your diet has a profound impact on your body weight and health.



Want to read more? Check out the clinic's website sffc.org and our nutrition blog sffcdietitian.wordpress.com