

# HEALTHFUL TIPS

HEALTH AND FITNESS TIPS FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

## Nature's Most Perfect Food



*With over 400 varieties, legumes are a staple all around the world!*

If you are on a mission to improve your diet and make your body stronger, then eating legumes is the best place to start. Considered a “super food” but often overlooked, legumes provide an array of health benefits. The reasons for their superstardom in the nutrition world are that legumes are low in fat, contain no cholesterol, and are high in folate, potassium, iron, and magnesium, which are four nutrients many of us could use more of in our diets.

In addition to all that goodness, legumes contain beneficial fats and soluble and insoluble fiber. The high fiber content helps the body maintain blood sugar and prevent constipation and other digestive woes. It also helps remove cholesterol from the body before it is absorbed, thereby reducing the risk of heart disease.

These few benefits mentioned are only some of what legumes, a class of vegetables that include beans, peas, and lentils, provide, yet they are often missing from our diets.

Probably the biggest fear people have about beans is their association with gas, but we can't let their “explosive” nature scare us away. Basically as the bacteria in our bodies breaks down fiber, gas is produced. So how do we address this issue?

- When soaking beans, change the water several times. Don't use the soaking water to cook the beans, since it will have absorbed some of the gas-producing indigestible sugars.
- Use canned beans—the canning process eliminates some of the gas-producing sugars.
- Simmer beans slowly until they are tender—this makes them easier to digest.
- Try digestive aids, such as Beano.
- Drink lots of water and exercise regularly, which will help the gastrointestinal system handle the increase in fiber.

With over 400 varieties, legumes are a staple food all around the world because they are so inexpensive and versatile, and they are available year-round. And since they are notoriously bland-tasting they can take on the flavor of any dish. Here are a few suggestions when looking for ways to add them to your diet:

- Prepare soups, stews and casseroles that feature legumes.
- Use pureed beans as the basis for dips and spreads.
- Add chickpeas or black beans to salads.
- Snack on a handful of soy nuts rather than on chips or crackers.

Experiment with what types of legumes you like best in your recipes to make your meals and snacks both nutritious and interesting.

Happy eating!

