



Whether you're trying to decrease cholesterol, improve blood glucose control, maintain a healthy weight or just improve your diet, legumes are versatile and nutritious. Beans are a great source of plant-based protein, are budget-friendly and they come dried or canned for convenience.

Dried beans are easy to use and most have soaking instructions on the packaging. Always check the date on any packaging to ensure your beans are fresh. Canned beans should be rinsed before use and can eliminate up to 40% of the sodium. Dried beans can soak overnight, or if you're short on time you can use a quick-soak method, refer to the bean package for detailed instructions. Soaking beans not only helps them cook faster, but it can also help with digestion. Lentils and peas don't need to be soaked, they can be rinsed and cooked according to your recipe.

Lentils, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), peanuts, pinto beans, and black beans are an example of plant-based proteins that have been shown to reduce cholesterol, help stabilize and even decrease blood glucose levels<sup>(1)</sup>; and improve healthy gut bacteria. Researchers have found that eating about ¾ cup of legumes daily reduced bad (LDL) cholesterol. It's also thought that including legumes in your diet can complement drug therapy and possibly lower the risk for cardiovascular disease<sup>(2,3,4)</sup>.

In a 2012 study from the Archives of Internal Medicine found when beans are combined with a low-glycemic diet, they can help lower blood glucose levels in people with type 2 diabetes<sup>(4)</sup>. The

combination of protein and fiber in beans helps to slow digestion; which slows the increase in blood glucose.

Studies report that beans can contribute to a healthy gut (microbiome). The microbiome is important to your immune system, weight, heart and overall health. The good bacteria in your belly are affected by the food that you eat and use fiber as a source of nutrition. Eating a diet high in fiber, like legumes, can improve gut health and decrease your risk of diabetes, heart disease, weight gain and risk of cancer<sup>(5,6)</sup>.

Vegans and vegetarians will find that legumes are a good plant-based source of protein. Legumes and lentils are a common source of protein for those who don't eat meat or who want to decrease their animal protein consumption. While legumes are a good source of protein, they aren't a "complete protein." If you rely on beans as a source of protein and your diet doesn't allow for any animal products, you'll need to include a complimentary protein to your meals. Grains, nuts and seeds are complimentary proteins to legumes, and combined they provide the complete protein your body needs.

There are many ways to reap the benefits of the magical bean. Add them to soups, salads and casseroles or make a dip. Try adding beans to meatballs or burgers to increase fiber in your diet. Including beans to your weekly meal plan can decrease your weight and your cholesterol; and your budget will like it too.

1. Dita Moravek, Alison M Duncan, Laura B VanderSluis, Sarah J Turkstra, Erica J Rogers, Jessica M Wilson, Aileen Hawke, D Dan Ramdath. Carbohydrate Replacement of Rice or Potato with

Lentils Reduces the Postprandial Glycemic Response in Healthy Adults in an Acute, Randomized, Crossover Trial. The Journal of Nutrition, 2018; 148 (4): 535 DOI: 10.1093/jn/nxy018

2. Nutr Metab Cardiovasc Dis. 2011 Feb; 21(2): 94–103.

3. CMAJ May 13, 2014 186 (8) E252-E262; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.131727>

4. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/beans-may-help-control-blood-sugar-in-people-with-diabetes>

5. Nutrients. 2013 Apr; 5(4): 1417–1435.

6. Food Research International, Volume 76, Part 1, October 2015, Pages 79–85