

Beans and Legumes

If you are like a lot of people, you probably have at least a can or two of beans hiding somewhere in the dark recesses of your kitchen. The humble bean often goes overlooked in our pantry, but we should be celebrating beans instead! Beans and legumes are inexpensive, nutrient-dense, and can add be incredibly versatile in cooking.

What are beans and legumes, anyway? Legumes are considered a class of vegetable called Fabaceae. The words legume and bean are often used interchangeably, but are two different things. A legume is the entire plant, while beans are just one type of legume. Other foods that are classified as legumes include peas, lentils, and peanuts.

As dietitians, we love legumes. From a nutrition perspective, legumes are a powerhouse. They are full of fiber and protein, often low-fat (in their natural form), and also contain a wealth of micronutrients and minerals. Most types of beans contain at least some iron, calcium, folate, and manganese, not to mention other vitamins.

Now that you are excited to jump on the bean bandwagon, here are some ideas for how to incorporate beans into your diet:

- Baked beans - these are a classic comfort food, of course. Baked beans are easy to find in a can, and there are several low sugar/low sodium options. You can also try making your own baked beans using canned pinto or kidney beans.
- Lentil chili - who needs meat when you have beans and lentils? Try substituting one cup of dried lentils in place of ground meat the next time you make chili. When the lentils are cooked through, they add a great texture and you will never notice the meat is missing.
- Peanuts for crunch - throw a handful of unsalted peanuts into your next salad or on top of an Asian-inspired dish. Doing this will add a great crunch!
- Hummus - chickpeas are also known as garbanzo beans, and are the primary ingredient in hummus. It works wonderfully as a dip for veggies and crackers, but you can also use it as a sandwich spread to add extra flavor.
- Beans and greens - kale, spinach, and arugula all pair well with beans to make a nutritious salad. You can eat this kind of salad cold, or heat everything up in a small saucepan. Add extra veggies for more nutrients!

Did I miss your favorite bean recipe? E-mail the SAPAS office at office@sapaseniors.org - I'd love to hear it!