

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Nutrient-packed beans a hearty addition to diet

We're thinking of incorporating more beans in our meals, primarily to reduce the amount of meat we're eating (and buying), but also because they're supposed to be very good for you. But my husband, who has type 2 diabetes, is worried about adding more carbohydrates. Is this a bad idea?

Actually, beans are a great option for everyone, perhaps especially for people with diabetes.

A 2012 study in *Nutrition Journal* tested the effect that pinto beans, black beans and dark red kidney beans have on blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes when eaten with white rice, which is known to cause blood sugar spikes. The researchers tested participants' blood sugar every 30 minutes for three hours after the participants ate either white rice alone or rice with one type of the beans. Even though the meals with beans contained more total carbohydrates, the participants' blood sugar was highest at each interval after they ate the rice alone than when the rice was paired with beans.

If your husband is concerned, though, encourage him to keep a close eye on his blood sugar levels after eating a bean-based meal. If he notices significant differences and is on insulin, he should discuss any changes in dosage with a health professional.

That said, beans are a healthful option that deserve a place at the table for just about everyone. In the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, beans are considered a unique food: They can be considered as either a meat substitute or a vegetable. They are high in both plant protein and fiber, as well as B vitamins, iron, folate, calcium, potassium, phosphorus and zinc.



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The fiber in beans can be significant. Adults should eat anywhere between 22 grams to 34 grams of fiber a day, depending on their caloric intake — most Americans don't get nearly that amount. Neither do Americans consume enough beans and other legumes, eating only about half the recommended amounts of 1.5-3 cups a week for men and 1-2 cups for women. Adding a bean-based meal or two to your weekly menu could go a long way to helping you meet those recommendations.

If you use canned beans, consider buying those that are lower in sodium. Or, rinse the beans before using them — that alone will reduce the sodium quite a bit.

If you start with dry beans — an economical option — first rinse them in cold water, picking out any pebbles or stems. Cover the beans with three times their amount of water and either soak for six hours, or bring to a boil and soak for at least two hours. Soaking overnight or after boiling makes them less likely to give you gas. Then, drain the beans and cook them in fresh water according to package directions.

If you currently don't eat a lot of beans, you may want to add them gradually to your diet. This will allow your body to get used to them and reduce the chance of gas and other gastrointestinal distress.

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