

6-21-19 Benefits of Beans

From the mouths of babes we hear wisdom indeed, when they sing, “Beans, beans; they’re good for your heart...” but there is no reason to heed the rest of the ditty because they did not have any gas prevention products at the time when those words were composed. I’ll get to the Beano TM but first let’s get to those beans.

Beans are from the legume family and they are not only famous for their gastrointestinal effects; beans are called the super food of the world for good reason. They can be dried, making them portable and long lasting. They are not only inexpensive to grow; they add precious nitrogen back to the soil, while most plants use it up, soon depleting the supply. They are part of a complete protein and they do, indeed, help the heart by providing water-soluble fiber. The soluble fiber of legumes helps lower levels of damaging LDL cholesterol in the blood, thus lowering our risk of heart-disease. The soluble fiber (picture cloudy, slippery water) and its protein value help to slow down the absorption of carbohydrates. This helps us avoid the unwanted crests and troughs in blood sugar levels, which is especially valuable to diabetics. The insoluble fiber (roughage) of beans also helps to prevent constipation.

Speaking of exhausting the supply, we do not have an endless supply of traditional proteins at our service, at least not if we don’t have the budget to plan all our meals around meat, not if we have decided to live as vegetarians, and not if we are athletes or making extreme demands on our bodies through hard physical labor. Our bodies need and depend on protein. Proteins are formed from long chains of amino acids. We can synthesize some of those amino acids in our bodies. Some amino acids cannot be formed in and by our bodies; those amino acids must be provided by our diet, thus the term “essential” amino acids. The ones that we can synthesize are called non-essential. I found these terms confusing when I took a nutrition class in college. It is not that the essential ones are more important or significant than the non-essential; it is “essential” that we ingest them as part of our diet.

The thing to keep in mind, if dependent on vegetarian sources of protein, is that only certain combinations form a complete protein. Many cultures somehow discovered this over the millennia, with combinations such as beans and rice becoming a life-saving staple.

I do not know if past generations suffered from flatulence when they ate legumes. Perhaps they were more accustomed to a diet high in fiber or perhaps they had their own way of combining foods to prevent gas from forming. I do know that the product called Beano TM really works, if used correctly. It contains a natural enzyme that helps to break down long chains of complex carbohydrates, like those found in beans, broccoli and nuts. Read the directions, take the pill (s) at the beginning of the meal, just before your first bite, and the gas will not form.

So, beans are inexpensive, can remain viable in a dried state for a long time, reduce heart disease, add valuable nitrogen to the soil, are fat free, prevent constipation and, when combined with other foods, such as rice, they form a complete protein. They are, indeed, a super food. And to top it off and reduce your concerns, they are so bland in flavor, they taste great when combined with a few tasty ingredients. I have a favorite recipe for bean dip and have not found a person yet who isn’t crazy about it. If you would

like a copy, just email me and I'll send it to you. The benefits of beans and friends are super, indeed.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax. She welcomes your comments and your own bean recipes. She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org