



# Bean Mythbusting Summary



Beans are an incredibly nutrient-dense superfood that can simultaneously benefit human and environmental health. However, myths and misinformation about beans abound. Let's look at what the science has to say about these topics - it's time for some bean mythbusting!



# Beans are for Everyone

Some people think that beans are only for poor people and/or vegetarians. Is that true, or are beans for everyone to enjoy?

- Beans are a perfect food choice for conscious consumers who want to choose foods that benefit both human and environmental health. They are associated with lower risk for chronic diseases and can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Plus, their long shelf-life can help prevent food waste and makes them a great, healthy pantry staple.
- Innovation in bean products is happening rapidly! Although affordable options still abound - which is important for food and nutrition security - there are many high-end and value-added options available, too. This includes heirloom bean varieties, beans in glass jars that have been carefully selected and cooked, and food products that use beans in cereals, snacks, and many other options.
- Beans can be an important staple in your diet, regardless of whether you are vegetarian or not. Beans are packed with plant-based protein and other nutrients like potassium, iron, and folate. Importantly, they are also one of the best natural sources of dietary fiber, which is not present in animal proteins.



# Flatulence

## Do beans really make you fart?

- Concerns about flatulence from beans may be highly exaggerated. Many individuals do not experience increased flatulence, and those who do often have symptoms disappear within 1 to 3 weeks of eating beans on a daily basis.
- If you are concerned about potential flatulence associated with beans, there are several ways to help reduce it: add beans to your diet slowly and give your body time to adapt to the healthy, higher fiber levels; soak dry beans and discard the soaking water to cook in fresh water; and try different types of beans if one type does not agree with you - your body may react differently to different types.
- Remember that some gas is not a bad thing, but rather a natural byproduct of bacterial fermentation of compounds that are not digestible by human intestinal enzymes. Diets full of high-fiber food feed our gut microbes and help maintain a healthy gut.



# Bean Nutrients

**Are beans a good source of high quality protein, or do you have to have animal proteins?**

- Beans are a rich source of plant protein. In 100 kilocalories of beans, there are about 7 grams of protein. This tends to be at least double the amount found in many common grains. For example, in 100 kilocalorie portions, there are only about 2 grams of protein in rice, 2 grams in corn tortillas or grits, and 4 grams in whole wheat pasta.
- Beans are sometimes called an “incomplete protein” and people believe they are completely lacking some amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein. However, beans contain all 20 amino acids, they simply have relatively low amounts of some amino acids. This is why it is often recommended to eat beans with other grains, like rice or millet, which have different amino acid make-ups. You do not have to eat them during the same meal, just have a varied diet throughout the day and week. When plant proteins are eaten as part of a well-rounded diet, they can meet all protein requirements, even if animal proteins are not included.

**Are beans too high in carbohydrates?**

- The carbohydrates in beans are very beneficial to health, and they break down slowly. Thus, beans are a low glycemic index food, which can help to avoid spikes in blood glucose levels and improve insulin sensitivity.
- The carbohydrate fraction of pulses includes dietary fiber and resistant starch, which are both associated with a wide variety of health benefits, including improved satiety and promotion of gut health.

**Are beans a good source of iron?**

- Many beans are rich in iron. However, the iron in plant foods is non-heme iron, which is less bioavailable for your body than the heme iron in animal proteins, meaning the body cannot absorb it as easily. Eating heme sources of iron or vitamin C-rich foods - like a squeeze of lemon or an orange - along with your beans can help increase the amount of iron that your body is able to use.

# Canned Versus Dry Beans

## Are canned beans less healthy than dry beans cooked in the home?

- Overall, both dry beans cooked in the home and canned beans are very healthy and provide similar nutrition and health benefits!
- Canned beans may have higher levels of sodium than beans cooked in the home. To avoid this problem, purchase low-sodium or no salt added canned beans. Draining and rinsing canned beans also helps reduce the sodium content because much of the salt is in the liquid.
- For a healthier option, try to choose canned beans that don't have a sugary sauce and are in BPA-free cans.

## Are canned beans worse for the environment than dry beans?

- Both dry beans cooked in the home and canned beans have much lower environmental impacts than most other protein sources. Although it can vary with type of animal protein and production methods, beans generally have a much lower impact than even the lowest-impact animal products in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use, and water use. One recent paper on the environmental cost of protein food choices highlights that, "To produce 1 kg of protein from kidney beans required approximately eighteen times less land, ten times less water, nine times less fuel, twelve times less fertilizer and ten times less pesticide in comparison to producing 1 kg of protein from beef." So, if using canned beans is more convenient for you and means you'll eat beans more frequently, then using canned beans is still generally much better for the environment than other animal proteins.
- Cooking dry beans in the home can have a slightly lower environmental impact than canned beans, with the amount depending on factors like type of bean and cooking method. When cooking beans in the home, choose a method that works well for you and your lifestyle, such as slow cooker, pressure cooker, or stovetop. A recent study shows that one way to reduce your environmental impact even further is to cook large batches of beans and refrigerate or freeze them, because this uses less energy than frequently cooking smaller batches.



# Bean Cooking Time

## Don't beans take too long to cook?

- There are several tips to reduce bean cooking time, including soaking beans and waiting to add acidic ingredients until the beans are cooked through.
- There is a myth that adding salt prevents beans from softening, but this is actually the opposite of the truth! Adding salt to the soaking and/or cooking water helps beans cook more quickly.
- There are a variety of ways to cook beans that can fit within different lifestyles, such as using a pressure cooker, slow cooker, or stovetop. You can also freeze extra cooked beans to have them ready to use anytime.
- The increasing availability of pre-cooked beans and bean-based products helps make it easier to include beans even when you do not have the time, equipment, or resources to cook your own from dry.

