

## BEANS IN THE NEWS

### BEANS: Versatile Food Promotes Health

By Joyce Davis, Loveland, CO, *Reporter-Herald* \*

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Don't know beans about fiber?

McKee Medical Center and Colorado State University's Crops for Health program are partnering in a research project that looks at beans not only for their valuable fiber content but for other health components as well. The study also addresses those barriers that might prevent folks from incorporating beans into their daily meals — the bean's reputation as "a poor man's food" and "the magical fruit."

Throughout October, McKee offered a different bean dish each day in its cafeteria, encouraging staff to participate in the "Bean a Day" program. The project concluded with a recipe contest in which employees shared their unique bean recipes.

A Web site was created on which the participants could post their thoughts about eating beans. Once all of the information is collected, Crops for Health personnel will sift through the results.

Lana Olsson, a registered dietitian working with the Crops for Health program, says the project will help Crops for Health determine how to proceed in promoting beans as a disease-preventive food.

"We'll be looking at how common attitudes about beans can be overcome — whether they give you gas seems to be a common complaint and deterrent," she said. "This is more of a wellness program for us, not a serious research program, so we can look at many common outcomes. We're hoping to find what consumers are looking for to help them become healthier."

The challenge for staff was to eat half a cup of beans each day, said Elizabeth Long, registered dietitian with McKee's outpatient nutrition services.

"Beans have so many nutritional properties we wanted to introduce to participants," she said. "Research shows beans are great for weight management, for lowering your blood pressure and in helping to prevent cancer.

"They also are very low in calories for the amount of protein they contain. It was a good way for people to become acquainted with how good they are for you," she said.

Because beans are high in fiber, they aid in good digestion, Long said. "Beans contain two types of fiber — soluble and insoluble — both of which are very important," she said. Insoluble fiber doesn't mix with water and provides bulk, moving through the body rapidly. Soluble fiber mixes with water and forms a gel, or paste-like substance, which binds with digestive juices, Long said. It moves slowly through the digestive system, pulling fats from the body and helping to lower cholesterol.

Beans also provide an economical way to get protein and are easily adapted into a variety of recipes. "You can put them in sauces, use them in toppings for pasta and in soups and stews," Long said. "At home, I make bean burgers by adding mashed pinto beans to hamburger."

Olsson says beans can be added to various recipes to provide added protein and fiber without anyone knowing. "You'd be surprised how versatile beans are and how they can be disguised," she said. "They have a lot of potential for being incorporated in muffins and quick breads. You can even mash them and put them in a cake mix. Follow the directions on the box, reduce the fat that's called for and substitute a small amount of mashed beans. You can experiment with many recipes to substitute beans for fat."

Olsson said thanks to the wide variety of beans available today, the choices are many. "There's a bean out there for everyone," she said.

### What's good about beans?

One-half a cup of beans contains:

- 100 calories
- 6 gram of fiber
- 6 grams of protein
- 0 grams fat
- 20 grams carbohydrates
- 300 mg potassium
- 50 mg calcium
- No cholesterol and a variety of antioxidants

### Health properties of beans

- High fiber content helps protect against diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.
- Insoluble fiber content helps keep blood sugars stable and prevents constipation.
- Soluble fiber helps to lower LDL-cholesterol and protect the heart.
- Protein content provides amino acids to build and repair muscles.

### Musical fruit?

The fiber and sugars in beans, instead of being digested or absorbed into the small intestine, pass directly into the large intestine to be broken down by natural bacteria. Beans ferment and form carbon dioxide and other gases that cause cramps and flatulence.

- To avoid discomfort, introduce beans slowly into the diet to give the body time to get used to them.
- Products such as Beano can be added to beans or taken separately.
- Adding a tablespoon of baking soda to the water in which beans are soaked may cut down on gas later.
- A splash of vinegar may be added to cooked beans to reduce intestinal problems. If added before, it can interfere with the cooking process.

