

# Nutrition News

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## Food Budgeting Beans: Economical & Tasty

Finding ways to stretch food dollars is important in these tough economic times. One way to get the nutrition you and your family need without giving up taste and variety is to make beans a regular part of your meals.

Dry beans and other legumes are some of the most widely available, inexpensive, versatile and nutritionally complete staple foods. A bag of dry beans, once cooked, provides healthful food for meals and costs less per serving than many other sources of protein like meat and fish. Beans supply important nutrients your body needs including complex carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals, and fiber. Also, they are low in fat and cholesterol.

Beans are convenient and easy to prepare. Canned or cooked dry beans can be used in an endless variety of ways. They can be used in main dishes, soups, dips, salads, casseroles and as a side dish. Beans need no refrigeration, peeling and, for canned beans, no additional cooking.

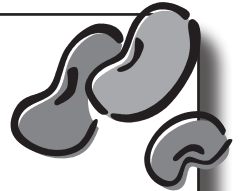
According to the American Dry Bean Board, canned beans may be stored up to 12 months in the original, unopened can. Dry beans can be cooked in large amounts and then frozen. They are easy to prepare in a crock pot. Making meals ahead of time can save time on those days when you are rushed to get dinner on the table.

Use beans to help with weight management. Beans have a lower glycemic index, which means they have less impact on blood sugar levels. They are also high in fiber, which provides a sense of fullness that helps reduce feelings of hunger. Also, depending on the variety, a one-half cup of cooked dry beans weighs in at about 120 calories.

Beans are good for your heart and health. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 and MyPyramid consider beans to be a part of the meat and vegetable group. Beans contain nutrients found in both food groups. They are also a nutrient-rich source of complex carbohydrates and contain dietary fiber, proven to reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. The American Cancer Society

Beans won't drain your food dollars. They are an especially low-cost source of protein and can be stretched across many meals. The cost of a 15- to 16-ounce can of cooked beans ranges from about \$1 to \$1.50. Check out these conversions to see how far a bag or can of beans will go:

- One can provides about three one-half cup servings or enough beans for two main dishes.
- One pound (or 2 cups) of dry beans will give you 5 to 6 cups cooked beans.
- A 15 ½-ounce can (drained) will give you 1 2/3 cups of cooked beans.
- One pound of dry beans equals three 15 ½-ounce cans (drained).



recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day and also choosing beans as an alternative to meat. Beans also contain folate, which helps protect against heart disease and stroke. Folate is also very important to pregnant women and their unborn babies. During pregnancy, women need more folate to help reduce the risk of birth defects in unborn babies in the first few weeks of their pregnancy.

Beans are also high in iron, but for your body to absorb the iron, eat foods rich in vitamin C with the beans. Foods rich in vitamin C are oranges and orange juice, tomato products, green peppers, cantaloupe, cabbage and broccoli.

The Dietary Guidelines emphasize the importance of beans in a healthful diet and recommend an adult intake of 3 cups of legumes such as beans each week. This amount

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is more than three times the amount adult Americans typically consume. Although children's suggested intake of beans vary with age, even at the lowest daily-calorie intake (1,000 calories), guidelines include a half-cup of beans for a vegetable serving, plus 3 to 4 half-cup bean servings as a protein source per week.

"Beans, beans..." Stop the music! Beans can cause intestinal gas in most people. You can cut down on gas by:

- Adding beans to your diet slowly over a three- to eight-week period. Once you are eating beans on a regular basis, you will have less of a problem with gas.
- Chewing the beans well and slowly helps digest them.
- Drinking plenty of water or other fluids to help your body handle the extra fiber from the beans and many strong-flavored vegetables.
- Soaking and cooking the beans using the "hot soak" method described below. This method gets rid of many of the gas-producing substance in beans.

## Cooking Dry Beans 101

Before dry beans can be used, they have to be plumped up with water. Several methods can be used to cook dry beans. Here are some tips on how to prepare them.

**Cleaning.** Before soaking beans, pick them over, and remove any small rocks or dirt pieces. Put the beans in a strainer, sieve or colandar. Rinse with cold water.

**Hot soak.** In a large pot, heat 10 cups of water to boiling for each pound of beans. Add dry beans; boil 2

to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, cover and let stand 4 hours or overnight (but not more than 16 hours). Do not remove the lid while beans are soaking. This method will produce the most tender beans.

To cook beans in a hurry, start to cook the beans after 1 hour of soaking. When the beans are done soaking, drain off soaking water. Rinse both beans and pan with fresh water. Follow your recipe directions.

**Traditional soak.** Clean and rinse beans. Cover with three times as much water as beans (i.e., 1 cup beans to 3 cups water). Soak overnight. Drain and use as directed in recipe or cover with water and simmer about 1 to 2 ½ hours until tender.

**Refrigerator soak.** In a refrigerator container with a lid, add 3 cups of cold water to each cup of dry beans. Cover and refrigerate for 1 to 3 days.

**Tender beans tips.** Here are some points to remember to get the most tender beans in the least amount of time:

- Add acidic ingredients, such as tomatoes, vinegar, ketchup, chili sauce, molasses or lemon juice after the beans are cooked to a tender stage. Add molasses before the beans are tender to keep them from softening even with a longer cooking time.
- Adding baking soda to beans will soften them, but adding baking soda also will destroy the B-vitamin thiamin and may give the beans a funny flavor. Use the hot soak method to soften the beans instead.
- Crock pot cooking is easy and time-efficient. Beans will cook to soft within 1 to 2 hours in a Crock pot.

For recipes and more information on bean cookery, go to [www.northarvestbean.org](http://www.northarvestbean.org).

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To find out more, contact your parish agent.