

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Go Beans!

Okay, we all know that burgers and steaks are standard meals from the grill in the summer. They're quick, easy, and of course delicious. But as a dietitian I have to remind you they're also likely to be raising your cholesterol with every bite. Bummer. What are your choices? Give up the burgers? Good idea, but not very likely for many people. So, how about putting some dishes on the menu that will lower your cholesterol? Now that's a good idea! Here, have some beans!

Seriously, have some beans! Cooked dry beans are at least as effective as oatmeal for lowering blood cholesterol levels. And a big bowl of baked beans certainly goes better with the burgers than a dish of oatmeal does. You can choose from white to pinto, red to black, little flat lentils to big round chickpeas, they will all help keep your heart and arteries happy. Plus you can go from mild three bean salad to fiery hot chili beans to suit your own taste buds too.

Some people will choose to eat beans for their protein content. They are definitely good sources of protein. Unlike meat, fish or chicken, beans have protein but have very little or no fat, and absolutely no cholesterol. That in itself is a good reason to eat more beans. Some people choose beans for the vitamins and minerals - B vitamins, zinc, or magnesium. Those are certainly good for us. And they can help keep our blood pressure down. They're super inexpensive too.

But the ingredient in beans that really helps manage our cholesterol is the fiber. Bean fiber is not like wheat bran. It's not crunchy or rough. Bean fiber is called *viscous* fiber or soluble fiber, because it dissolves in water and thickens it. You can see that when you cook a pan of beans. The juices around the beans get thick. You can see it when you open a can of beans. The water around a can of red beans is not clear and liquid like the water in a can of corn. What you are seeing is the effect of the viscous fiber that came out of the beans and thickened the water.

When we eat beans the fiber thickens as it goes through our intestines. Now the thick liquid acts like a sponge, sopping up cholesterol and bile acids. Bile acids are made from cholesterol by our livers. The cholesterol from our meal (that steak or burger) and the bile acids our livers made to help digest the meal get caught in the fiber. When the bean fiber soaks them up, they can't be

absorbed. They continue on down through the intestines and pretty soon they're gone.

Study after study has found that the more beans we eat, the lower our blood cholesterol is likely to be. Not only did we not absorb the cholesterol from the meal, our livers have to take more cholesterol out of our blood to make more bile acids. Keep eating beans, and your cholesterol numbers will go down.

There are probably other ways beans and bean fiber helps. Some scientists think that bean fiber, as a prebiotic, helps the good bacteria in our guts to grow. These bacteria will produce other chemicals that keep our guts healthy. Beans also have phytonutrients that prevent our livers from making more cholesterol. And there is some evidence that beans have something that helps keep our arteries flexible, which lowers blood pressure too.

Of course, the important question is "How much do I need to eat?" Relax, it's not some impossible amount. Just half a cup a day of cooked dry beans is enough to make a measurable difference. That can be any of the standard beans, from black to white and all colors in between, lentils or chickpeas. Here's a cool, colorful and easy way to increase your bean intake. It makes enough for a party, so call the family and share.

Marinated Black Bean Salad

1 can, 15.5 oz, black beans	1 ½ cup cooked brown rice, cooled
2 Tbsp chopped onion	1 ½ cups broccoli florets
2 Tbsp chopped red bell pepper	2 Tbsp canola oil
1 Tbsp vinegar (red wine or apple cider)	¾ tsp dried thyme
¼ tsp garlic powder	1 ½ tsp dried parsley flakes
¼ tsp ground black pepper	red pepper or chili powder, optional

Drain and rinse the beans. Lightly steam the broccoli if desired. Combine beans, rice, broccoli, onion and bell pepper in large bowl. Combine rest of ingredients in small bowl and whisk well. Pour over bean mixture and toss gently. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to allow flavors to penetrate.

Serves 8-10. Adapted from BeanInstitute.com

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