

Love your lentils

Pulses should be a regular feature in everyone's diet, especially if you have diabetes.

Lentils are easy to grow, environmentally friendly, highly nutritious and an affordable source of healthy low-fat protein.

As well as being good for the waistline and the planet, pulses - including lentils, dried beans, chickpeas and split peas - have many benefits for people with diabetes.

They have a low glycaemic index (GI) meaning that they are slowly digested and absorbed. This results in greater feelings of "satiety" (fullness and satisfaction) after a meal and help with blood glucose control.

Pulses have a high fibre content and eating them regularly can help us achieve the recommended daily intake of dietary fibre. Much of this fibre is soluble, known to have a small additional effect in lowering cholesterol.

Eating lentils, beans, dried peas and chickpeas regularly may reduce your intake of less nutritious, higher fat foods. This is because of the very low fat content of pulses, combined with the fact that they are highly filling.

How often should everyone try to eat pulses?

Aim for 4-5 servings per week, which aligns with the New Zealand Guidelines Group's Guidelines for the Management of Type 2 Diabetes. It defines a serving as 1 cup of cooked dried beans, chickpeas, lentils or split peas (dahl).

There isn't an equivalent guideline for people with type 1 diabetes but the same benefits of pulses also apply. However if you are not used to eating pulses regularly, it is important to introduce them slowly and watch for hypoglycaemia after the meal.

Eating pulses five times a week will be a challenging target for many people. If you have not used many beans, chickpeas or lentils in the past, start slowly and gradually expand the variety of meals that include them, and the number of servings per week.

One of the easiest ways to increase your intake is to use them to partly replace meat - think of the red kidney beans in chilli con carne, for example.

Beans or lentils are a good way to make a small amount of meat go further, particularly mince. Another trick is to use a tub of "falafel" mix (made from chickpeas and found in the chilled section of the supermarket) and combine it with mince to make tasty meat patties.

Winter soups are another great way to use pulses. In summer they are great for adding fibre and protein to salad meals.

Canned beans or lentils that are ready to use are a simpler option than cooking dried beans when you are not familiar with pulses. Look out for varieties canned without added salt.





Preparing dried beans and chickpeas

- > Most **dried pulses** need to be **soaked, drained and then cooked** before they are ready to be included in a dish. Use fresh water (no salt) and leave overnight. Drain and rinse. Do not skip this step as it is vital! Draining removes many of the compounds that can contribute to “wind”.
- > **Boil or simmer the beans in water** (again don't add salt), following the cooking instructions on the packet. This may take over an hour (it's faster in a pressure cooker). Cooked beans and chickpeas should be tender and be able to be mashed against the roof of your mouth.
- > Any kind of **lentil, green or yellow split peas and black-eyed beans** do not need to be soaked prior to cooking. Follow the cooking directions on the packet.
- > Cooked beans and chickpeas can be **frozen** in meal-sized amounts meaning that enough for several meals can be soaked and cooked at one time.

Diabetes New Zealand is a leading national organisation and registered charity. Our aim is to support all people affected by diabetes to live well through: Providing information and support to help people take charge of their health • Acting as an advocate and representing all people with, or at risk of developing, diabetes • Raising awareness of diabetes, especially around lifestyle factors that can help prevent or delay type 2 and help manage and control type 1 and type 2.