

Beans, Beans, Good for Your Heart...

by: Betsy Bearden

Now that I have your undivided attention...

Beans, glorious beans! Ah yes, the musical, magical fruit, but did you know they are actually a nutritional fruit? The Cowboys had the right idea, although imagine being around that chuck wagon campfire after dinner time. No thank you!

Beans, also known as legumes, contain pound for pound the following: potassium, folate, iron, magnesium, and protein. True, the protein found in beans is incomplete, but when combined with certain grains such as rice, you have a super food on your hands and in your stomach!

In fact, when beans are paired with rice, this creates a thread of nine essential amino acids: (Isoleucine, Leucine, Lysine, Threonine, Tryptophan, Methionine, Histidine, Valine and Phenylalanine). Protein found in beans and grains have opposite strengths and weaknesses, so when combined, they complete each other. Pretty cool, huh?

Being vegetarian has its challenges when it comes to eating a healthy, balanced diet, but when beans and rice are consumed within the same day, your body receives the complete protein and complex carbohydrates it needs without receiving cholesterol or saturated fat. In fact, consuming beans on a regular basis actually helps to lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol because of all that great fiber. So, it really is true, beans *are* good for your heart. For my money, this equates to: beans+rice= who needs the stinking meat?

Yes, there is one small problem with beans, and we all know what that is, but when beans are introduced to our diets on a regular basis, our digestive systems become accustomed and will adjust. I wouldn't advise eating two cups a day at first; slowly adding them to your diet is certainly best.

Soaking beans overnight can help. After they have had a good soak, discard the water, rinse them, add fresh water, and cook according to package directions. There are also products available such as Beano, which will definitely help. On the other hand, if you are trying to ante up on your protein, there *is* one perfect food out there just waiting for you. Of course, that perfect food is tofu.

Around my house, I am known as "The Tofu Queen," which is the "darling" little title that my husband, Steven, affectionately gave me years ago. Don't laugh! "I might not be a smart person, Jen-NAY, but I do know what tofu is."

For one thing, tofu is made from the soybean. The soybean contains *complete* protein. It is the only bean that does. Do you understand what that means to vegetarians or to people who simply want to cut back on the amount of red meat, or poultry that they eat each day?

It is complete protein-but better protein than that of meat, dairy products, or poultry. Better because just as with ordinary beans, tofu does not contain cholesterol or saturated fat as meat and

dairy products can. The reason I point this out to you is that I realize many of you will never give tofu a fair chance, but practically all of us eat beans. However, tofu is much easier to digest than regular beans, due to the way in which it is processed, so this is definitely something to keep in mind while trying to decide.

So now that you have learned how to incorporate a little more complete protein into your diet each day, I hope you will want to learn more about tofu. You will find a delicious and easy way to get started with the recipe I have included below.

In closing, there are just a few things to remember: whether you pair tofu with rice; beans with rice; beans with whole grain bread; peanut butter and whole grain toast; tofu stir-fry served over rice and like-pairings, you can't go wrong with the balanced nutritional content here.

To celebrate the mighty bean, I have included an easy Chili recipe that I hope you will enjoy. Let me know it turned out for you!

EASY CHILI WITH TOFU (and or beans)

3-Tbs. extra virgin olive oil
1-15.5 oz can Black Beans, drained and rinsed
1- 28 oz. can diced stewed tomatoes-(undrained)
2- cans vegetable broth
1- container of extra-firm tofu- cut into small cubes
1- large onion-sliced
2- cloves garlic-minced
1- large bell pepper –any color- diced
1-tsp. crushed red pepper
1- Tbs. chili powder
1- Tbs. red wine vinegar
1- Tbs. cumin
1- Tsp. cilantro
1/4-cup honey
1- Tbs. tomato paste
1- cup water

- Place three tablespoons of oil in a large pot; sauté on medium-high heat: tofu, onions, and bell pepper for about seven minutes. Add in garlic and sauté for about 3 minutes longer, careful not to burn garlic.
- Add all remaining ingredients and simmer for about one hour.
- To serve: Drop a heaping teaspoon of sour cream on top and sprinkle with cheddar cheese. To balance this protein packed meal- serve with whole grain crackers.

If you choose not to use tofu, just add an extra can of beans, but if you do then please remember to take your Beano! Dig in and enjoy!

Resources:

The Book of Tofu, Ballantine Books; William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/protein.html>

Betsy Bearden is a certified and published writer, and the author of a self-published cookbook, *Normal People Eat Tofu, Too*. She has worked as a volunteer chef, and cooking class instructor at Kroger's School of Cooking in Alpharetta, Georgia, and as a reporter for *The Paulding Neighbor Newspaper*. You can reach her at betsybearden@bellsouth.net or visit her website at www.creativewrites.net