**Food as medicine topic: beans**

Beans (legumes) are considered one of the healthiest foods available. They are high in fiber, protein, complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and they are inexpensive. Beans can help with weight control, lower LDL cholesterol, regulate blood sugar levels, and protect against many chronic diseases. In fact, studies show the more beans you eat the longer you live. This is true for folks all around the world. Some examples include the Japanese eating soy products; the Swedes eating brown beans and peas; those in the Mediterranean region eating lentils, chickpeas, and white beans; and the black beans and pinto beans eaten in the South American regions.

Dr. Michael Gregor, in his book *How not to Die,* recommends that, “Even if at first they make you gassy, beans are so health promoting that you should experiment with ways to keep them in your diet at all costs.” He goes on to say that people’s concerns about excessive flatulence from eating beans may be unfounded. In fact, the main source of gas for most people is eating dairy products. However, here are some ways to decrease gas from eating beans:

* Soak dried beans for at least 4 hours and up to 12 hours.
* Rinse canned beans well to remove excess salt and starches.
* Cook beans until very soft.
* Use fresh water for cooking, not the soaking liquid.
* Add spices such as ajwain, epazote, ginger, or cumin to the beans while cooking.
* Eat slowly and chew well each bite.
* Add beans slowly into your diet, starting with small portions.

Here is a four-bean salad recipe I’ve adapted from the cookbook *Straight Up Food* by Cathy Fisher. You can include any variety of beans (salt-free) you have available. I use a fat-free Italian dressing as a base for easy preparation, and use dried cilantro if I cannot get fresh.

**For the salad:**

3 cups frozen mixed vegetables (green beans, corn, peas, carrots)

1 can cooked black beans (15 ounces; about 1½ cups), drained and rinsed

1 can cooked kidney beans (15 ounces; about 1½ cups), drained and rinsed

1 can cooked garbanzo beans (15 ounces; about 1½ cups), drained and rinsed

½ cup finely chopped red onion

Chopped cilantro or dried cilantro to taste (use as much as you like. This is optional, but I try to get lots of greens in every dish. You can also use parsley or fresh basil)

**For the dressing:**

½ cup (or more) fat-free Italian dressing

1 T. mustard (any kind)

1 T. tomato paste plus 1 T water

2 T. vinegar (any kind)

1 T. Taco seasoning

1 T. dried Italian seasoning (optional; I try to get as many herbs and spices in my dishes for an added antioxidant boost)

Place all the salad ingredients into a large bowl.

Place all the dressing ingredients into a small bowl and blend with a fork. Stir into salad.

**Notes:**

* **Scoop this salad up with baked corn chips or use to stuff tortillas.**
* **Use as topping for baked potatoes, sweet potatoes, or winter squash and add your favorite salsa and hummus.**