

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. **What is NNW?**

National Nutrition Week (NNW) started in the 1990s when the Department of Health was approached by the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA). It was agreed that it was important for nutrition messages to be included in the Department of Health Calendar. World Food Day is recognized on the 16<sup>th</sup> October, and Nutrition Week in the week preceding this, namely from 9 to 15 October.

The objective of NNW 2016 is to create awareness among the public about the health and nutritional benefits of eating pulses and soya regularly. **The theme for NNW 2016 is: “Love your beans – eat dry beans, peas and lentils”.** This supports the global theme from the United Nations: *‘2016 International Year of Pulses: Nutritious Seeds for a Sustainable Future’*.

2. **What are legumes and pulses?**

Pulses are part of the legume family. Legumes include foods such as green beans, peas, peanuts, dry beans such as soya beans, kidney beans, black beans, split-peas, chickpeas and lentils. The term “pulses” is limited to crops harvested solely for the dry seed. Dried beans, lentils and peas are the most commonly known and consumed types of pulses.

3. **Why are dry beans, peas and lentils good for us?**

Dry beans, peas and lentils contribute to better health, healthy budgets, varied food intake and environmental sustainability:

- They help prevent diseases such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure and diabetes and can help with weight loss;
- They are rich in fibre and can improve digestion, assist with reducing blood sugar spikes after meals, can improve colon health and lower blood cholesterol;
- They are good sources of vitamins (especially thiamine, riboflavin, niacin and folate) and minerals (calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and zinc);

- They are a source of non-haeme iron (iron coming from plants) and is used well by the body especially when eaten with foods rich in vitamin C (e.g. guava, oranges, naartjies, etc) to improve uptake by the body;
- They are a good source of plant protein which is low in fat and naturally free of cholesterol;
- We can eat them instead of meat or other animal foods and still be healthy, as they are an economical source of protein;
- We can use them to make meat 'go further';
- They help the environment as they are water-efficient and help to keep the soil fertile and healthy;
- They don't require refrigeration to be stored before being cooked.

4. How often should we eat dry beans, peas, lentils and soya?

One of the South African Guidelines for Healthy Eating state that dry beans, split-peas, lentils or soya should be eaten regularly. That means that these foods should be eaten at least four times a week. Try to add them to dishes for instance, samp and beans; lentils and mince; or chickpeas with chicken, use in salads, soups and dips, or make sandwich fillings and snacks. Also try to eat them on the days that you don't eat meat.

If you do not eat meat, fish, chicken, eggs or milk, you should eat dry beans, split-peas, lentils or soya every day as part of a healthy eating plan that includes starchy foods and plenty of vegetables and fruit.

5. How much dry beans, peas, lentils or soya can be eaten at a time?

A serving size is:

- ½ cup of cooked or canned dry beans, peas or lentils;
- 3 tablespoons (45 ml) dry soya mince;

These amounts can be doubled if you are not eating meat, fish, chicken, eggs or milk in a meal or if you are a vegetarian.

6. If these foods are so good why are people not eating them?

They have been an essential part of the human diet for thousands of years. Nowadays, their nutritional benefits are often greatly underestimated. In some cultures pulses have a stigma of being a 'poor man's food' and are replaced by meat once people can afford meat, however nutritionally speaking dry beans, peas and lentils are one of the most nutrient-dense foods (rich in fibre and good sources of certain vitamins and minerals). Other reasons why they are underestimated are: they can cause bloating and flatulence (gas) and

unless dry beans are pre-soaked for hours and can take a long time to cook. However, we hope to share some great tips and recipes during National Nutrition Week to inspire you to eat more dry beans, peas, lentils and soya.

7. What can people do if they experience bloatedness?

Some people may feel bloated and experience flatulence (gas) if they are not used to eating dry beans, peas or lentils. If you never eat these foods, start including them in your eating routine slowly. First eat them once a week, then twice a week, then three times or more a week. Your body gets used to these foods, which means you will be able to reap the many health benefits that they have to offer.

8. How can we include dry beans, split-peas, lentils and soya in our eating plans?

- Pulses and soya can be gradually phased into a person's eating plan in order to become more familiar with these foods;
- Use soya mince and dry beans to make mince meat and mince stews go further. They are also more economical than meat;
- When dry beans, split peas or lentils are combined with a starchy food (wholegrains) nuts or seeds, the proteins from the two foods complement each other and make a better quality protein;
- Include beans, peas and lentils in soups, stews, mince, pasta dishes or rice dishes;
- Keep a variety of canned legumes, e.g. lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, etc for a quick meal (for instance salad with chickpeas or bakes beans on wholewheat toast) or side dish (for instance bean salad at a braai);
- Consider adding one meatless (vegetarian) meal per week, for instance Meatless Mondays, and use dry beans, split peas or lentils in place of meat;
- Change your favorite recipe by replacing half the meat with legumes;
- Try a new recipe for dry beans, peas, lentils or soya each week.
- Enjoy bean soups or a bean salad for lunch or for dinner.
- Try a bean or lentil dish when eating out instead of a meat dish;
- Try a vegetarian burger with a salad when eating out.
- Experiment with recipes such as lentil soup, chili, bean salad, etc.
- Cook a large batch of beans and freeze into smaller portions;
- Try hummus, or other bean dips, with fresh cut vegetables for a healthy snack;
- Try beans in a salad. For instance, mix different kinds of dry beans to make a bean salad

9. Is it necessary to soak dry beans, peas or lentils before cooking?
- Dry beans and dry chickpeas (uncanned) need to be soaked before cooking. Soaking dry beans and dry chickpeas in water from 4 to 8 hours will:
    - Dramatically reduce the cooking time and the tendency to cause flatulence (gas).
    - Ensure that they are more easily digested and their nutrients better absorbed by the body. Raw dry beans, peas and lentils contain high levels of 'anti-nutrients' such as phytate, tannin and phenol, which can limit the body's absorption of minerals, such as iron and zinc.
  - Canned beans, peas and lentils have already been cooked and can be used straight away, after it has been drained and rinsed to reduce its salt (sodium) content.
  - It is not necessary to soak split-peas and lentils, but they must be sorted first to remove any debris and then rinsed and drained before they are cooked.
10. How should dry beans be soaked?
- It is important to sort and rinse beans first to remove any debris, such as pebbles, seed pods, leaves or sprigs.
  - Soak beans in plenty of water. Use at least 3 cups of water for every 1 cup of beans, for at least 4 to 8 hours and preferably overnight.
  - Drain beans, discard soak water and rinse with fresh, cool water.
11. Does it help to add baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) when or cooking soaking beans?
- Some recipes suggest adding baking soda to help soften beans, to eliminate gas, to retain colour or to lessen cooking time. This is not recommended as baking soda destroys vitamins such as thiamin, and may make the pulses too soft and give it a soapy taste afterwards.
12. How should dry beans, peas, lentils and soya be cooked?
- Cooking time can vary, so never cook different types of pulses together as each has its distinct cooking time. Generally, most beans, whole and chick-peas will cook to the desired tenderness in one to one-and-one-half hours, split-peas about 45 minutes and whole lentils 20 – 30 minutes. Soya beans take longer to cook – about 3 – 4 hours.
  - Place pre-soaked beans in a pot with fresh cold water. During cooking the quantity of water should not exceed a third of the volume. Cover, bring to the boil

and simmer with the lid still loosely covering (it stops the water evaporating too much) until they are soft and tender.

- Beans increase in size by 2 ½ times after cooking.
  
- Soya mince can be used in the place of real mince. Reconstitute the soya mince by soaking it in water for 5-10 minutes before cooking, or by following the manufacturer's instruction. Soya mince requires seasoning, so that it absorbs flavour when cooked together with other ingredients. Some of the commercially flavoured soya mince brands can be high in salt (sodium).

13. Is it possible to cook dry beans, peas and lentils in a pressure cooker or microwave?

- When using a pressure cooker, be sure the pot is no more than half full (including liquid). Cooking times vary for different beans, peas and lentils; therefore the manufacturer's instructions should be used. Generally soaked beans take 15 minutes and unsoaked beans require 20 – 25 minutes.
- Microwaving does not reduce the cooking time for beans, peas and lentils. It usually takes 60 – 90 minutes to reach maximum and uniform tenderness with this method.

14. It seems that cooking dry beans and peas takes a long time, is there any way that one can save electricity?

A haybox or wonderbag can be used. It works like a slowcooker, but it doesn't need to be connected to an electrical outlet. It has the advantage that:

- It saves cooking time and energy;
- Food is ready in the morning (e.g. porridge) or when a person comes home from work;
- A dish won't burn, overcook, or dry out.

A wonderbag is available commercially. Alternatively it is easy to make your own haybox, using a wooden or cardboard box, and insulating material like straw or newspaper. For instance, Take a big cardboard box and fill it with balls of newspaper. After the beans have cooked for 30 minutes, take the pot with lid from the stove, wrap in a thick towel and place in the hay box. Pack balls of newspaper around and on top of the pot. You can also use cushions or blanket instead of just newspaper. Leave the pot in the box for about four to six hours. A well insulated haybox should hold heat for at least 8 hours.

15. Can one store cooked beans, peas and lentils in the fridge or freezer?
- Cooked beans, peas and lentils that are not eaten immediately, should be cooled down and placed in a closed container in the fridge or freezer.
  - They should not be left at room temperature for more than two hours.
  - Cooked dry beans, peas and lentils that are kept in the fridge should be eaten within two days.
  - Cooked dry beans, peas and lentils can be frozen for 2 – 3 months. Portion and freeze them in smaller quantities according to need. Defrost by placing into hot water for 5 minutes (if frozen in plastic bags) or use the microwave.
16. Where can one get more information about eating dry beans, split-peas, lentils and soya?
- [www.nutritionweek.co.za](http://www.nutritionweek.co.za);
  - The Department of Health: [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za); Telephone numbers:
    - National: 012 - 395 8770
    - Western Cape: 021 - 583 5663/2275
    - Eastern Cape: 040 - 608 1705
    - Northern Cape: 053 - 830 0551
    - KwaZulu-Natal: 033 - 395 2326
    - Free State 051 - 408 1281/1896
    - Gauteng 011 - 355 3551
    - North West 018 - 397 2364
    - Mpumalanga 013 - 766 3413
    - Limpopo 015 - 293 6198
  - The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA): [www.adsa.org.za](http://www.adsa.org.za); [info@adsa.org.za](mailto:info@adsa.org.za)  
Telephone: 011 - 061 5000;
  - The Nutrition Society of Southern Africa (NSSA): [www.nutritionssociety.co.za](http://www.nutritionssociety.co.za)  
Telephone: 082 667 4723.
  - The Heart and Stroke Foundation: [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za);  
Heart and Stroke Health Line: 0860 1 HEART (43278);