

# Eat more beans to experience benefits to your health

I heard that eating beans is good for you. Is that true? How can I convince my family to do so? They say eating beans gives them gas and stomach aches. They just want meat to eat. HG, Greenville

**A** Sarah Elliott is an ECU senior dietetics student, and she wants to tell you about beans. She says that since coming to ECU she decided to buy less meat for financial reasons. She prepares large batches of beans to incorporate into her regular diet. She says it's been a very positive shift in her life and health. Here is more of what she wants you to know.

Beans, beans, they're good for your heart. The more you eat them . . . well, you know the saying. Beans often get a bad rap for causing stomach distress. But in reality, they're an affordable, nutrient-rich, versatile component of any healthy



**KATHY KOLASSA**

diets and they can be prepared in appetizing ways to appeal to picky eaters.

Beans are exceptionally nutritious. They are great sources of protein, which can help you feel full and build and repair muscle. They also contain a lot of fiber, which keeps things moving through your gastrointestinal tract (GI) — the passageway of the digestive system. Beans also provide micronutrients like folate, iron, potassium, and magnesium.

The 2020-25 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

recommend consuming at least 1.5 cups of beans per week, which is approximately three servings. Beans have been shown to promote overall health. There are many research reports about the health benefits of eating beans. One study demonstrated that participants who ate a cup of beans daily significantly reduced their risk of a heart attack.

Other researchers have found that consuming beans regularly helps both in the prevention of heart disease and in the management of type 2 diabetes.

Some individuals do experience an upset stomach when they first add beans to their diet. Beans can cause gas because they contain complex carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates are made up of several simple sugar molecules arranged in a way that our bodies can't digest. When these carbohydrates pass

through the GI tract, bacteria in our guts feed on them and produce gas.

However, beans should not be avoided for these reasons. You can minimize any unpleasant consequence. Soak dry beans overnight before cooking, which breaks down some of the complex carbohydrates. If you're using canned beans, rinse them to remove some of the starch released from the beans into the liquid. Another strategy is to increase your bean consumption gradually, and your digestive tract will likely adjust over time. If you still struggle with digestive symptoms, you may benefit from taking an enzyme supplement that helps break down the starches. There are several brands available.

It can be a tricky task to convince your family to accept beans as a regular part of their diet if they are

big meat eaters. A great first step is to engage your family in a conversation about health. Explain all the ways that beans are good for you. You can invite your kids or grandkids into the kitchen when you're preparing beans to involve them in the process.

You can add beans to familiar meals that your family regularly eats or "sneak" them into meals. Add beans to casseroles, blend them into dips, mash into burgers, or add to stews to pack an extra nutritional punch. If you use lentils instead of ground beef in sloppy joes or spaghetti, you will get about 8 more grams of fiber, 11 fewer grams of saturated fat, 30 fewer grams of total fat, and about 200 fewer calories per serving.

Your weekly grocery savings will add up quickly by switching meat for beans just one time per week. A pound of beans costs

approximately \$1.72, while ground beef costs more than \$5 per pound on average. Therefore, for a family of 4, you could save up to \$1 per serving by preparing bean burgers instead of beef burgers for dinner.

Beans are also a much more environmentally friendly option. A team of researchers found that producing about two pounds of protein from kidney beans required around 18 times less land, 10 times less water, and nine times less fuel than producing the same amount of protein from beef.

Overall, incorporating more beans into your family's meals can help you be healthier, save money and be environmentally conscious. What's not to love?

**Professor emeritus Kathy Kolassa**, a registered dietitian nutritionist and Ph.D., is an affiliate professor in the Brody School of Medicine at ECU.

## ASK THE DOCTORS

# Babies and young children particularly susceptible to heat rash

**Q** We recently relocated for my husband's job. It's hotter here and a lot more humid than our previous home. All three of our children, including the baby, are suddenly dealing with heat rash. Why does that happen? How can we help them avoid it?

**A** It has been a long, hot summer, and we suspect you are not alone in dealing with the unpleasant realities of heat rash. The condition is also sometimes referred to prickly heat, a succinct summary of the symptoms and their root cause. In medical language, it is known as miliaria.

These terms all refer to the patches of small, raised bumps that develop when someone's sweat glands and sweat ducts become blocked, often due to heat and

humidity. These blockages can occur at the surface of the skin, or deeper within the sweat duct.

When your sweat ducts or glands become blocked, perspiration can't spread out across the surface of the skin. Instead, the moisture backs up within the epidermis. This leads to irritation and inflammation and a constellation of other symptoms. These can include itchiness that can become severe, a persistent prickling or burning sensation and swelling. In pale skin, the bumps of heat rash typically appear as areas of reddening. In darker skin, a change in skin color in the affected area may not be apparent.

The blockage that leads to heat rash is caused by a persistent layer of perspiration, often mixed with



**EVE GLAZIER**



**ELIZABETH KO**

the skin's natural oils. It occurs when sweat becomes trapped, often due to high humidity, which prevents adequate evaporation.

Babies and young children, whose sweat glands have not yet fully developed, are particularly susceptible to heat rash. So are adults who are overweight or obese, and anyone who is overdressed in

hot and humid conditions.

Common sites of the condition include the backs of the knees, beneath the breasts, the armpits, creases of the elbows, neck, inner thighs, back, waist and groin area.

While uncomfortable, heat rash is usually harmless. Treatment focuses on cooling the affected area and keeping it clean. This can be done with a moist cloth or a cool bath or shower.

Dress your children in a single layer of loose-fitting clothing, which helps eliminate friction. Natural fibers, like cotton and linen, are more breathable than synthetics. Shorts and sleeveless tops are helpful. So is proper ventilation. This same approach to preventing heat rash applies to adults, too. When it comes to your baby, do

frequent diaper checks, and change it as soon as it is wet or soiled.

Areas of persistent itchiness in someone with heat rash can be soothed with over-the-counter ointments and lotions meant to treat rash.

As with any site of inflammation, infection is possible. This can cause sweat ducts with deeper blockages to develop small pockets of pus. If this occurs, it is important to seek medical help in dealing with the infection. When treated, heat rash goes away in a day or two. If the condition persists or appears to get worse, see your health care provider.

**Eve Glazier, M.D., MBA**, is an internist and associate professor of medicine at UCLA Health. **Elizabeth Ko, M.D.**, is an internist and assistant professor of medicine at UCLA Health.

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