

Edinburgh Community Food – On the Pulse of Health

Beans & Pulses

By Chris Mantle, Senior Food and Health Development Worker at Edinburgh Community Food

In the last edition of The Speaker we talked about superfoods, suggesting that we don't need to go for expensive 'trendy' food items such as acai berries or wheatgrass but instead can plumb for much cheaper and equally nutritious options. The real superfoods are often much more humble things like oats, onions or sardines. Other un-sung heroes are everyday beans or pulses. These come in many shapes and colours, are very cheap and are widely available too. But more importantly, they are absolutely packed with fantastic nutrition!

The term pulses refers to various types of seeds which come from pods. Beans and pulses are often used interchangeably but in everyday usage pulses is a broader name, also taking in lentils, dried peas and even certain seeds. Although technically pulses, legumes like green beans and garden peas are thought of as vegetables and peanuts are classed, perhaps unsurprisingly, as nuts. It is thought that we humans have been cultivating and eating these foodstuffs since the Stone Age.

So what makes beans and pulses so great? Pulses are an excellent source of protein with one portion contributing 15-40% of our daily needs (depending on the variety) and so are a much cheaper alternative to meat. They are also full of minerals and – because they can be high in calcium and really high in iron – are important parts of the vegetarian or vegan diet. In terms of vitamins they are a good source of some B vits, plus folic acid. As a result pulses count as one portion

(only) of our at least five-a-day fruit and vegetable intake. It's also worth noting that they are very low in sugar and – unlike meat – fat.

These days it's all fat and sugar that are making the headlines but we're in danger of forgetting about other really vital parts of our diet, especially the slightly unglamorous fibre. Fibre doesn't only 'keep us regular' and reduce bowel cancer, it also helps us to digest sugars healthily, may reduce blood pressure and cholesterol and helps keep our blood sugar on an even keel (potentially reducing the risk of diabetes type 2). It is also very filling and may help us maintain a healthy weight. And while unfortunately most of us in Scotland don't eat enough fibre beans and pulses are fantastic sources of it, with a portion providing up to 50% of our daily requirements. Meat, on the other hand, contains no fibre at all.

How can we add more beans and pulses to our diet? Cannellini beans, haricot beans and all other types may all be added to stews, casseroles, soups, pasta dishes and curries and can also provide much needed protein in salads. Chickpeas may be blended and made into hummus or added to many Mediterranean or North African dishes. Would a chilli con carne be the same without kidney beans? And don't forget the Scottish favourite, lentil soup! Just bear in mind that baked beans contain a lot of added salt and sugar so only eat them occasionally.

Although dried pulses are cheap to buy they can require some serious soaking and boiling – up to 12 hours soaking and 60 mins cooking. Tinned ones are widely available and although a bit dearer weight for weight they are already cooked so we only need to warm them up. Just check the label to make sure they don't contain added salt. Beware, however, that uncooked kidney beans are poisonous. If you are using dried kidney beans follow the instructions on the packet and make sure they are thoroughly boiled! Tinned ones though are perfectly safe to eat straight from the can. All pulses freeze very well so

you can cook in bulk and save portions for a later date.

So, with all this in mind, why not have a shot at this delicious Chickpea Curry?

Sour Chickpea Curry

Serves 4-6; 15 mins prep; 30 mins cooking

Ingredients:

- *Dash of oil*
- *2 medium onions, chopped finely*
- *8 garlic cloves, peeled and minced*
- *½ tin whole plum tomatoes*
- *3 cans unsalted chickpeas, drained*
- *1 vegetarian stock cube*
- *1-2 tbsp curry powder*
- *1 tbsp or more lemon juice*
- *1 tsp garam masala (optional)*
- *1 fresh hot green chilli, finely chopped (or ½ tsp cayenne pepper)*
- *2 tsp. very finely grated fresh ginger or 1 tsp. powdered ginger*

Method:

- 1. Take half the onion and mix in a bowl with the lemon juice, chilli powder, ginger and set aside.*
- 2. Heat the oil in a wide pot over a medium flame. When hot, put in the rest of the onion. Stir and fry for 5 minutes and then add the garlic. Keep frying until the mixture is a rich medium-brown shade. Turn the heat to medium-low and add the curry powder. Stir for a few seconds. Now put in the finely chopped tomatoes. Stir and fry until the tomatoes are well amalgamated with the spice mixture and browned lightly.*
- 3. Add the drained chickpeas, crumbled stock cube, 1 cup water and the garam masala if you have it. Stir again. Cover, turn the heat to low, and simmer for 20 minutes.*
- 4. Add the onion mixture in the cup and serve with brown rice*

and wholemeal naan bread.

Submitted by [Chris Mantle](#)

