



Words Anita Bean

One small change **EAT MORE** pulses

Take a fresh look at lentils and check back
in with chickpeas – bean cuisine
is where it's at this autumn



Pity the pulse, which has never been truly appreciated by the British public. Unlike many other nations, where beans and lentils are a culinary cornerstone

– think of India’s myriad dhals, Mexico’s bean-filled stews and that unending commitment to houmous across the Middle East – we’ve often looked down on them as a bland health food, only beloved of cost-conscious students and hippies. Baked beans, of which we eat more than two million cans every single day, are the honourable exception.

According to a 2022 survey by the British Nutrition Foundation, one in three adults and more than half of children have never even tried lentils, and a similar number haven’t sampled chickpeas. Which seems crazy when you think that by the simple act of introducing more pulses into your diet, you’ll reap significant nutritional rewards – not to mention a delicious new world of textures and flavours.

So what are pulses? They’re edible seeds that grow in pods, and include all types of tinned or dried beans, lentils and peas: think chickpeas, red kidney beans, butter beans, black-eyed beans, cannellini beans, green, yellow and brown lentils... the list goes on, but they are all part of the legume family. Pulses are dried before they are eaten – so fresh peas and beans are legumes; dried peas and beans are pulses.

Pulses might be small, but they are truly mighty when it comes to nutrition. “They’re an incredible source of protein and fibre, and they are also low in fat,” says registered dietitian Rosie Martin.

“Pulses may help protect against conditions such as heart disease,

diabetes and bowel cancer, and they can also help us manage our weight more easily.” The World Cancer Research Fund, which recommends the consumption of foods “mostly of plant origin”, advises including them at every meal.

Pulses have been shown to reduce levels of ‘bad’ (LDL) cholesterol in the blood, and are a great source of iron, with lentils containing slightly more than beans or peas; a 125g serving of cooked brown or green lentils provides just over 15% of a woman’s, and more than a quarter of a man’s, daily iron needs. They’re also a delicious way of getting your zinc, important for immunity – a 125g serving of chickpeas provides around 15% of your daily recommendation.

The humble pulse is also one of the highest fibre foods – 125g of any variety provides one quarter of your daily needs. Research continues to show the importance of fibre on digestive health. Pulses contain fermentable fibres which provide a food source for ‘good’ gut bacteria.

Trying to cut down on meat? Pulses also do a great job of providing the protein your body needs. There’s 8-9g in half a can (around 125g drained weight) of any variety, about one fifth of what a woman and one sixth of what a man needs each day. It is worth noting that many plant proteins do not contain a complete amino acid profile (the building blocks of protein), in the way that animal proteins do; you’ll need to eat a variety and combine pulses with grains – such as dhal and rice – to ensure you tick off all the amino acids you need.

On top of all these benefits for your body, there’s the fact that swapping animal-based products in favour of pulses is better for the planet. It helps reduce greenhouse gas

emissions, land use and water supply. Pulses don’t need artificial fertilisers; they can even improve the quality of the soil they are grown in. They’re also a deliciously affordable food source – and their powerful combination of protein and fibre means they are digested slowly, making you feel fuller for longer.

There is, of course, the issue of wind. The reason pulses can lead to unwanted gas is raffinose, a type of carbohydrate they contain. Raffinose is indigestible by our enzymes and so passes into the lower intestine, where it is fermented by ‘good’ bacteria, resulting in wind. “If you currently have minimal pulses in your diet, build up gradually. You could start by swapping half your beef in a bolognese sauce for lentils, adding some chickpeas to your chicken curry, or spreading houmous on your sandwich. Gradually building up will allow your gut to acclimatise

to the increased fibre and fermentable carbohydrates over time,” advises Rosie Martin. If you’re using dried pulses, make sure you soak, rinse and cook them well before consuming: this can facilitate easier digestion. Anything tinned (although not the classic baked bean, obviously), should be drained and thoroughly rinsed before using.

Not sure where to start? Just look around the world to see how delicious pulses can be – and see overleaf for easy recipes. Whether you’re filling quesadillas with black beans and cheese, scooping up houmous or simmering a cassoulet, pulses are endlessly versatile. And don’t worry – baked beans still count. »

**‘Pulses
might be
small but
they are
mighty
when it
comes to
nutrition’**

Spiced tomato & lentil shakshuka

Protein-rich pulses add extra flavour and nutrients to this classic North African-inspired baked egg dish. Perfect for brunch, lunch or supper with a hunk of crusty bread served on the side.

Serves 4

Prepare 10 minutes

Cook 30 minutes

- 2 tbsp Essential Olive Oil
- 1 red onion, halved and sliced
- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
- 2 Essential Red Peppers, finely sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tsp Cooks' Ingredients Baharat Spice
- ½ x 25g pack flat leaf parsley, stalks finely chopped, leaves roughly chopped
- 2 x 400g cans chopped tomatoes
- 400g can Essential Lentils, drained and rinsed
- 4 large eggs
- 60g Essential 50% Reduced Fat Greek Salad Cheese
- ½ tsp dried chilli flakes
- Crusty bread, to serve

1 Put the oil in a large, lidded frying pan (about 25cm diameter) and set over a low-medium heat. Add the onion, chilli and peppers and cook, stirring often, for 10 minutes, until soft but not browned.

2 Add the garlic, baharat spice and parsley stalks. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring, then add the tomatoes. Season, turn the heat up a notch and simmer for 5-7 minutes, until the tomato mixture has begun to thicken. Stir in the lentils and simmer for a couple more minutes.

3 Make four generous, evenly spaced hollows in the sauce using a wooden spoon and crack an egg into each. Cover the pan, reduce the heat to low and cook for 7-10 minutes, until the egg whites are firm throughout and the yolks are set to your liking. Remove the lid,

scatter over the parsley leaves, Greek salad cheese and chilli flakes and serve with crusty bread to mop up the sauce.



3 of your 5 a day

✓ Per serving
(without bread)

1261kJ/302kcal/15g fat/4g saturated fat/
20g carbs/11g sugars/7g fibre/18g protein/
0.8g salt/high in protein

SIMPLE SWAPS

Can't find baharat spice? Substitute with ras el hanout or use a combination of ground cumin, smoked paprika, chilli powder and ground coriander. »

Butterbean, leek & ham hock stew

This autumnal dish is the very definition of nourishment. It will keep for up to 3 days in the fridge (if you have leftovers or want to cook ahead) – the flavours will only intensify.

Serves 4

Prepare 10 minutes

Cook 35 minutes

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 350g Cooks' Ingredients Frozen Soffritto Mix
- 4 thin Essential Leeks, trimmed and cut into 4cm lengths
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 3 cloves garlic, finely sliced
- 2 x 400g cans Essential Butterbeans in Water, drained and rinsed
- 900ml fresh chicken stock
- 180g pack Cooks' Ingredients Pulled Ham Hock
- 5 tsp mustard
- ½ x 20g pack dill, chopped

1 Put the oil in a large saucepan or flameproof casserole dish over a low-medium heat. Add the soffritto and cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes until beginning to soften. Stir in the leeks and bay leaves, then continue to cook for 5 minutes, stirring now and then, until just beginning to brown. Add the garlic, cook for 2 minutes, then tip in the butterbeans, stock and about ¼ of the ham hock.

2 Bring the stew up to simmering point and simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, until the beans are meltingly tender and the leeks are completely soft. Add 1 tsp mustard and ½ the dill, stirring to combine thoroughly. Carefully fold in the remaining ham and season (the ham is quite salty). Simmer for a couple of minutes to heat through until piping hot, then serve in warm bowls. Sprinkle over the remaining dill and some freshly ground black pepper; accompany with the remaining mustard.



High in protein

Per serving

1373kJ/328kcal

12g fat/2.1g saturated fat/24g carbs/
8.5g sugars/11g fibre/26g protein/1.8g salt/
3 of your 5 a day/gluten free



RECIPES & FOOD STYLING ALICE HART PHOTOGRAPHS TOBY SCOTT STYLING SARAH BIRKS

WAYS TO EAT MORE PULSES

Roast chickpeas with spices to make a nutritious snack or salad topper: mix with a little oil and favourite crushed spices, such as cumin and coriander seeds, paprika and chilli flakes.

Blend cooked pulses with roasted vegetables such as sweet potato, beetroot, squash or carrots (plus tahini, lemon juice and olive oil) for delicious dips.

Add cooked lentils or pulses to warm salads with roasted shallots, lots of herbs, root vegetables, and sharp mustardy dressings – great on their own or with roasted meats or cauliflower cheese.

Simmer cooked pulses in stews, soups and saucy dishes to bolster their protein content and absorb the flavours of the sauce or broth (this can also stretch out the meat in a ragù).

Find more pulse recipes at [waitrose.com](https://www.waitrose.com).

