

**Q.** Whenever I eat a lot of legumes it causes gas, which can be embarrassing. What can I do to make beans less gassy?

**A.** Legumes are excellent foods to include regularly in the diet. They are high in protein, free of cholesterol, and low in fat – and the fat they do have is a healthy fat. They are also good sources of protective nutrients, such as folate (protects against colon cancer and birth defects), potassium (protects against high blood pressure), iron, and magnesium (good for the heart). Legumes are one of the foods highest in dietary fiber.

The high-fiber (complex carbohydrate sugars) content is what causes the higher gas formation. Keep in mind that a certain amount of intestinal gas is normal and desirable for moving intestinal contents along in the gut. In fact, it shows that the gut is functioning as it should. The normal person produces about 2 liters (4 pints) of intestinal gas daily – and releases that gas a dozen or more times daily.

Here are some suggestions for minimizing excess gas problems:

- **When cooking beans, discard the water they were soaked in before cooking them.** This helps get rid of some of the gas-producing fiber that dissolves in the water.
- **Simmer beans slowly and thoroughly when cooking until they are tender.** This improves digestion and reduces gas formation in the gut. Pressure cooking beans until they are very tender helps even more.



- **When eating beans, take Beano<sup>®</sup>,** a commercially available product made from a natural food enzyme (alpha-galactosidase) that helps break down the gas-forming fiber (complex sugars) in the beans or other high-fiber foods (whole grains and certain vegetables). For Beano to be effective, take it at the start of the meal (before you eat) to prevent gas, bloating, and other discomfort. Beano is available in most grocery stores.

- **Be physically active daily.** If you exercise regularly, such as brisk walking or running, you stimulate the gut motility (spontaneous and active movement), significantly decreasing the amount of time food has in the gut and thus gas formation.

Remember, beans are a healthy food and are recommended by the USDA [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) website as a good alternate to meat, which is linked with higher risk of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. There are many types of beans, including black beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), edamame (green soybeans), lentils, split peas, lima beans, kidney beans, and fully-matured soybeans. Peanuts are also a legume and high in protein.

Fiber helps prevent diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and some cancers, such as colon cancer. Eat beans at least 3 or more times weekly; daily for best health.

