

Keeping a Pulse on Good Nutrition

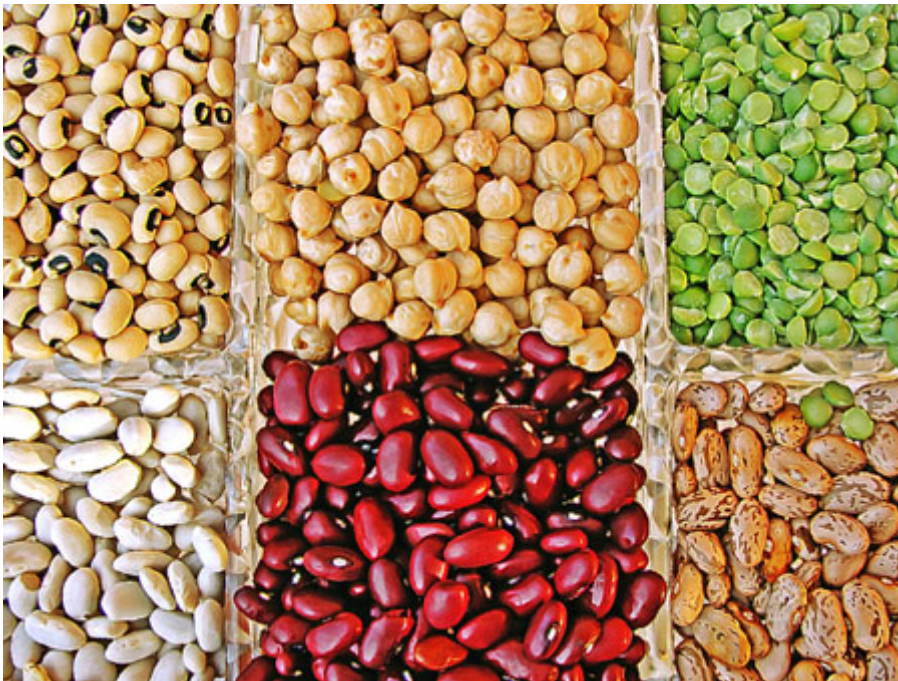
These grains and seeds are music to a healthy diet

By Melanie Peters | June 30, 2016

When the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations declared 2016 to be the International Year of Pulses, you probably thought, huh?

What's a pulse and why should we be eating more of them?

Pulses are the grains or seeds of legumes and are ["limited to crops harvested solely for dry grain"](#). Still confused? You probably know them better as lentils, dried beans and chickpeas or garbanzo beans.



Pulses are a great source of protein. In fact, they have twice the amount of that darling of superfoods, quinoa — which is good news if you want eat a more plant-based diet. And, because they are high in water content, eating pulses will make you feel fuller faster, which helps limit calories consumed.

While many of us may avoid beans due to their, uh, explosive reputation, a 2011 study [debunked this pervasive notion](#)

. Beans, lentils and chickpeas are also excellent sources of soluble fiber, which is known to reduce the risk of heart disease and keep [blood sugar levels low](#) . Pulses are also [high in B vitamins](#).

Adding pulses to your diet is not only good for your health, it's good for the environment. Considered a sustainable food, pulses have a low carbon footprint. They're water efficient and they [enrich soil they're grown in](#) . Cooking pulses can require some serious prep time, especially as many recipes using dried beans suggest soaking the beans in water for up to 24 hours.

However, the tide is turning on this [age-old cooking adage](#) so don't let a lack of planning on your part keep you from experimenting.

Here are some suggestions to help you pulse-up your diet:

[Hummus](#) (recipe courtesy of Mark Bittman):

Probably the most well-known use of chickpeas, hummus is easy to make and versatile. You can serve it with raw vegetables for a healthy snack or appetizer or substitute it for mayonnaise in your favorite sandwich to add depth and flavor.

[Vegan Lentil Burgers](#) (recipe courtesy of Food Network):

Nothing says summer quite like a burger hot off the grill. This vegan-friendly version gets its meatiness from lentils, which are not only high in protein and fiber, they're easy on your wallet.

[Cannellini Beans with Spinach](#) (recipe courtesy of *Bon Appétit*):

This dish can be made up to three days ahead and be served as a side dish to your favorite lean protein, such as grilled salmon, or on its own with some crusty, whole-grain bread. You can skip the soaking part by buying canned cannellini beans, just make sure to rinse and drain them well before using so you can better control salt content.
