

Legumes for a Healthy Heart

Results from a 19-year follow-up study show individuals who regularly consume legumes have decreased risk of heart disease.

In a 2001 study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, scientists found that frequent consumption of legumes dramatically reduced the risk of heart disease. Heart disease is our leading killer in the United States.

Previous studies have demonstrated that soybean protein and soluble fiber each reduce the risk of heart disease, but this research is the first to show that consuming legumes – such as beans and peas – also reduces the risk. Legumes are high in both plant protein *and* soluble fiber.

Researchers followed 9,632 women and men without heart disease for an average of 19-years. The participants completed detailed questionnaires about their dietary intake and the researchers later analyzed them to determine legume consumption. The investigators then compared the different levels of legume intake to whether the study participants developed heart disease.

The scientists found that people who ate legumes 4 or more times per week had 22% less risk of developing coronary heart disease than those who ate legumes less than 1 time per week. These findings support the important role of legumes in the diet and the researchers concluded that increasing legume intake might be an important dietary factor in preventing heart disease in the general population.

A healthy diet and lifestyle have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. A diet that is low fat, low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and high in foods rich in soluble fiber and plant protein – like legumes – appears to play an important role in heart disease prevention.

References:

Bazzano, LA, He, J, Ogden, LG, Loria, C, Vupputuri, S, Myers, L, Whelton, PK. (2001). Legume Consumption and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in US Men and Women. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161(21): 2573-2578.