

Lean on lentils for better health

Lentils don't have to be the mush you remember being served in high school lunches. When cooked right, lentils are chewy yet tender, with the kind of feel and flavor we expect from comfort foods. So banish any unpleasant memories and take advantage of this highly versatile food.

Anyone who cooks with lentils appreciates their many benefits. For starters, lentils cook quickly because, unlike dried beans, they don't require soaking. They are also highly flexible in the way they can be used, from salads, dips and soups, to stews and toppings for whole grains like rice or couscous.

Health experts love lentils because they are rich in vitamins, minerals and the phytochemicals that help protect your body from cancer and other chronic diseases. Popular in many parts of Europe, India and the Middle East, this fiber-packed legume has long been used to inexpensively extend dishes with hearty bulk. But leave it to the French to raise lentils to a high culinary level — their small, green variety is considered a delicacy in France.

tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For a hot entrée, combine cooked lentils with a variety of chopped cooked vegetables and serve over cooked bulghur or rice. Or try this lentil salad, which will delight you with its style and pizzazz.



Crunchy: Crunchy lentil salad is healthy and tasty.

- CRUNCHY LENTIL SALAD**
- 1 cup dried green or brown lentils, sorted, rinsed and drained
 - 2½ cups reduced-sodium, low-fat chicken or vegetable broth
 - 2 cups corn kernels
 - 1 cup chopped celery
 - 1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
 - ½ cup chopped red onion
 - ½ cup balsamic vinegar
 - 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 - 1 tablespoon fresh marjoram
 - 1 teaspoon dried grated orange zest
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Place lentils and broth in medium pan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Cover and cook for 25 to 30 minutes or until tender.

Drain in colander. Transfer to large bowl. Mix in corn, celery, parsley and onion. Let cool.

Meanwhile, in small bowl whisk together vinegar, oil, marjoram and zest.

When lentil mixture is at room temperature, drizzle dressing over top and toss lightly to mix in. Add salt and pepper to taste, if desired.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Store in refrigerator, tightly covered.

Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 230 calories, 6 g. total fat (less than 1 g. saturated fat), 37 g. carbohydrate, 12 g. protein, 12 g. dietary fiber, 276 mg. sodium.

Recipe courtesy of the American Institute for Cancer Research.

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