

Getting the Most out of Your Grains & Legumes



Grains and legumes are excellent sources of protein, however they do need some preparation in order for you to get the most out of them nutritionally. This is because they contain anti-nutrients; substances that inhibit the absorption of nutrients along the digestive tract.

Phytic acid, also known as phytate is one type of anti-nutrient that is a powerful inhibitor of mineral absorption, namely calcium, iron and zinc. Enzyme inhibitors, saponins, lectins and tannins are other examples of anti-nutrients that affect the absorption of nutrients and along with phytates can be reduced with soaking and sprouting processes.

The most effective method to reduce the anti-nutrients is to soak in water for around 12 hours, followed by cooking. Adding a splash of vinegar when soaking will accelerate the breakdown of the anti-nutrients, remembering to take care to rinse thoroughly after soaking as the anti-nutrients are released into the soak water. This process greatly helps with digestion and absorption of protein and will also reduce uncomfortable digestive issues such as bloating and gas.

Sprouting can greatly enhance the nutrient quality of grains and legumes which can then be eaten raw or cooked. A few commonly sprouted legumes and grains include adzuki beans, mung beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), whole lentils, barley and rice. Legume and grain sprouts are quite flavoursome, have interesting textures and have very little of the troublesome sugars that can cause digestive issues in some people.

Another factor important for effective protein digestion is stomach acid levels. Adequate amounts of stomach acid are needed to activate the enzymes required for protein breakdown and absorption. Stress, low zinc levels and dehydration can all interfere with stomach acid levels therefore compromising the digestion of protein. This is why it is important that we are watching our stress levels, taking time out for ourselves, eating adequate amounts of zinc rich foods and ensuring we are always properly hydrated.

Making these simple choices a part of our daily routine can make all the difference for our digestive health and general well-being.

One last recommendation for added flavour and to further support digestion is to add some invigorating spices to the pot when cooking your legumes and grains. I love using fennel, cumin, coriander, anise seeds, ginger and turmeric.

Enjoy your week in the kitchen,

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