

## Chickpeas

Chickpeas, also known as garbanzos, were mentioned in last week's breakfast enhancer article in the form of hummus. Although a very popular way to eat this legume, it's most certainly not the only way. Chickpeas can be found dried or canned. Canned chickpeas are the most ideal for creating creamy hummus, crispy snacks, and incorporating into meatless meals. Dried chickpeas can be used in similar fashion but require more preparation and planning ahead.

Dried chickpeas need to be rinsed and then allowed to soak in cool water for 8-10 hours. Soaking the beans allows them to soften, improving digestibility and cooking measures. After soaking, chickpeas need to cook in the oven or over the stove for 1-1.5 hours, pressure cooker for about 20 minutes, or on low in a slow cooker for 3-6 hours. Adding salt to the soaking mixture will give beans a creamier texture and promote more even cooking while adding baking soda to the water prior to heating will speed the cooking process. Salt and acidic ingredients like citrus juice, vinegar or tomatoes may increase cooking time and should be added towards the end. Remember, as dried beans and legumes soak their volume increases. One cup of dried chickpeas will yield 2.5-3 cups cooked chickpeas.

Chickpeas are predominantly grown in India but are also grown in Australia, Canada, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United States. A beige, plump, sweet and nutty tasting chickpea predominates the markets in North America. Another variety that carries a more earthy flavor and is smaller and darker in color is used more commonly in India.

Nutritionally chickpeas offer a generous amount of fiber and other micronutrients. A half cup of cooked chickpeas provides about 6 grams of fiber, 7 grams of protein, more than 30% of the daily value of folate, and 10% of daily value for zinc and iron. Interestingly, chickpeas also contain phytate, a compound naturally found in the legume that can decrease the absorption of iron, zinc, and other nutrients. The good news is that this compound can be lessened through the soaking, boiling, and cooking processes. One other nutritional quality to be mindful of is the potential sodium content of canned foods. Look for cans of chickpeas labels "low salt/sodium" or "no salt/sodium added" and rinse them well to reduce sodium contents.

Unopened dried chickpeas can be stored in the pantry for up to two years but after opening should be stored in a tightly sealed container for up to one year. Cans may have a shelf life of 2-5 years after the date of purchase. Leave your prepared chickpeas covered in water or cooking liquid in a sealed container in the refrigerator for 4 days or in the freezer indefinitely. Frozen beans will keep the best texture and flavor if used within 6 months of freezing.