Spilling the Beans

Research Links Beans to Healthy Aging

March is Nutrition Month in Canada, and a great opportunity to look for ways to increase the nutritional value of our meals. A simple way to do this is by eating more beans!

Beans are well-known for their nutritional qualities, and research shows that they can even reduce the risk of developing chronic disease. This is particularly important for older adults who are at a higher risk. Despite the known health benefits of beans, many older adults do not eat beans as part of their regular diet.

In fall 2018, Dr. Alison Duncan and her research team from the University of Guelph hosted an event for older adults called “Spilling the BEANS!” to promote the health benefits of beans. More than 50 community members attended, as well as three representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, who funded the research in partnership with the University of Guelph.

Dr. Duncan began the presentation by sharing research linking beans to healthy aging, and her work exploring bean consumption among older adults. Afterwards, chef Kevin Hughes provided a cooking demonstration, preparing simple recipes using beans as key ingredients. Guests were invited to sample four different recipes, including a Blueberry Lemon Loaf and an Orange Ginger Smoothie, both featuring white beans, and a Gingerbread Bar and a Midwest Bean Salad, both featuring black beans.

The recipes, which were adapted from Pulses.org, were tailored to increase the likelihood that older adults would try them. For example, portion sizes were made smaller, ingredient lists were simplified, and instructions adapted for less cleanup and to eliminate the need for heavy cookware.

After sampling the recipes, guests had the opportunity to ask questions of the research team and explore a variety of tools and resources on display. One of these resources was a Bean Toolkit, which includes a meal planning guide to help older adults add beans to their daily diet. The toolkit also shares recipes for smaller serving sizes, convenient for one or two people. Visit our website at www.the-ria.ca to access a digital version of The Simple Bean Toolkit.

"[The] information definitely changed my outlook of beans in my diet. Love the idea of presenting easy recipes," said one satisfied guest.

After attending the event, 80% of guests said that they were more aware of the health benefits of beans, and 77% said they were more likely to eat beans.

Enhancing Life

The Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging aims to enhance the quality of life and care of older adults through partnerships in research, education and practice. Innovations are developed and tested in the Schlegel Villages, and then shared to benefit older adults everywhere.

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