

**Lentils**

Lentils, peas and beans are also known as pulses and legumes. They are the edible seeds of plants belonging to the family Leguminosae, taking the name from the characteristic pod or legume that protects the seeds while they are forming and ripening.

Pulses have been used as food for thousands of years. The lentil was probably one of the first plants ever to be domesticated by humans. Lentils originated from the wild lentils that still grow in India, Turkey and other Middle Eastern Countries. Even now lentils are mainly produced and consumed in Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and the Middle East. Because of the interest in international cuisine and healthier diets, there is a new interest in lentils.

Lentils are very low in fat, high in insoluble fibre, and a good source of vitamins, high in complex carbohydrates and are an excellent source of protein. Lentils are frequently referred to as a super food and are a vital part of the vegetarian diet.

Available all year round from most supermarkets and health food shops, lentils come in many colours – green, red, brown and yellow. They are eaten either whole or unhulled (with the skin still intact) or split in half with or without their skins. Brown and green lentils hold their shape well after cooking and are excellent for salads. Red lentils cook quicker and are ideal in purees and soups. You can add lentils to soups, casseroles and meat sauces to add extra texture and flavour; it also means you eat less meat, which automatically reduces the calorie density and cost of the dish. Unfortunately some lentils need to be pre-soaked. But do not be put off by this. First have a look at the great nutritional value and then give them a try.

**Lentils per ½ cup cooked (1 portion)**

<b>1. Calories</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Total fat (g)</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Saturated fat (g)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Monounsaturated fat (g)</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Polyunsaturated fat (g)</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Dietary fibre (g)</b>	<b>7.8</b>
<b>Protein (g)</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. Carbohydrate (g)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3. Cholesterol (mg)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>4. Sodium (mg)</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Folate (mcg)</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Iron (mg)</b>	<b>3.3</b>