

For immediate release

New study shows eating pulses every day improves blood vessel function and fights heart disease

April 20, 2009 (New Orleans, LA) – Eating beans and peas every day is not only good for you; it can help fight cardiovascular disease – the number one cause of death worldwide.

A new clinical study by researchers at the Canadian Centre for Agri-Food Research in Health and Medicine (CCARM) shows that daily consumption of pulses – beans, peas, lentils and chickpeas – leads to major improvements in blood vessel function in individuals with peripheral arterial disease (PAD), a condition in which blood flow to the limbs is reduced. Study findings were presented today at the Experimental Biology conference in New Orleans.

Over 10 million people in North America suffer from PAD and many more are undiagnosed. PAD is a form of atherosclerosis, a progressive disease that leads to narrowing and hardening of the blood vessels in the legs. PAD causes pain, cramping or numbness when walking and, in severe cases, can lead to amputation. The clinical study showed that eating half a cup of pulses a day for eight weeks resulted in significant improvements in arterial function such as increased blood flow and decreased arterial stiffness.

“Eating pulses brings back that arterial flexibility and may actually reverse the disease process,” explains CCARM team leader Dr. Peter Zahradka, who conducted the study with human nutritionist Dr. Carla Taylor and Dr. Randy Guzman, a vascular surgeon at St. Boniface Hospital. “We were astonished when we saw the results – the improvement in vessel function through diet was much greater than our best expectations.”

Regular pulse consumption also reduced the body mass index of study participants and significantly reduced circulating total and LDL cholesterol levels. Study findings also showed that regular pulse consumption increased the dietary intake of fibre, folate, Vitamin C, iron, zinc, potassium and protein.

“The study tells us that by making a few simple changes in your diet, you can improve your health significantly, potentially reducing the need for expensive pharmaceuticals,” says Dr. Taylor. “Pulses are a true functional food – they may offer significant protection against cardiovascular disease, are readily available and the amount can be easily integrated into an everyday diet.”

CCARM is a partnership between the University of Manitoba, St. Boniface Hospital and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and is located in Winnipeg, Canada. The study was one of seven clinical trials funded by Pulse Canada, with support from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and Canada’s pulse grower associations. Pulse Canada is the national association representing growers, processors and traders of Canadian pulses.

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