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INNOVATION

Why hummus is a dip in demand

Although often described as an ancient food of the Middle East, hummus has only recently become widely adopted in the United States.

The creamy, thick dip is made from cooked, mashed chickpeas or other beans and is available almost everywhere, including grocery stores, convenience stores, school cafeterias, delis and restaurants.



Hummus has become so beloved, there's even an International Hummus Day celebrated on the third Thursday in May.

Bonnie Taub-Dix, RDN, owner of BetterThanDieting.com and author of "Read It Before You Eat It," finds people of all ages are digging the dip.

"Moms and dads love hummus, and they're happy their kids are dipping veggies into hummus (kids love to dip), but it's also become a fave of millennials. Older adults benefit from the fiber, plant proteins and creamy consistency of hummus."

The Hartman Group named hummus a top trend at the Fancy Food Show last year, noting that consumers like hummus because it's a nutrient-dense food and deeply rooted in Middle Eastern cuisine.

Rich in nutrients

Chickpeas, also known as garbanzo beans, are the main ingredient in classic hummus recipes. They're blended with tahini, which is ground sesame seeds, and flavored with a little olive oil, lemon and garlic

An increasing number of consumers are gravitating toward plant-based snacks with heart-healthy, whole food ingredients like the ones found in hummus.

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"Chickpeas are high in fiber to help keep things moving and prevent constipation. The soluble fiber within can help to lower cholesterol levels. Chickpeas also contain plant proteins, which are healthy for people and our planet," says Taub-Dix. "The combo of protein and carbs within can help stabilize blood sugar. This type of snack replaces other snacks that may be less nutrient-rich."

Some of the more progressive flavors, like Taub-Dix's guacamole hummus recipe, provide bonus henefits

"This recipe is particularly unique because it's made with avocado – a fruit that could help to lower cholesterol. It's a real crowd-pleaser!"

Rooted in food cultures of the Middle East

Hummus is prepared and used in a myriad of ways in the Middle East, and according to the Hartman Group, popularity of Middle Eastern cuisine in the U.S. grew in the 1990s and has gained even more interest in recent years.



Current innovations in hummus focus on a global fusion of flavors from cuisines around the world – not just the Middle East.

Taub-Dix's guacamole hummus recipe, for example, merges the two favorite dips of Mexico and the Mediterranean.

Other emerging key flavors are Spicy Chill, inspired by the flavors of Mexico; Cilantro Chimichurri, a blend to recreate a classic condiment of South American cuisine and Sundried Tomato and Basil, Italian inspired flavors that often include artichokes.

Beyond globally inspired flavors and fusions, some of the biggest innovations in hummus come from the use of beans other than chickpeas.

General Mills recently introduced six hummus varieties by Food Should Taste Good, but only a few of them use chickpeas. One is made with black beans, one with white beans, one with lentils and another recipe uses edamame or young soy beans.

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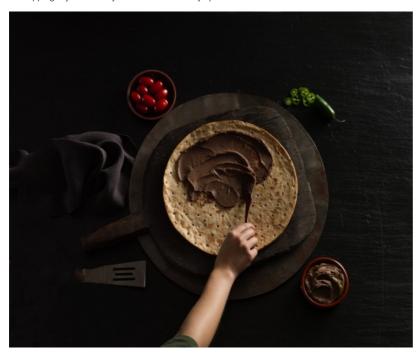




These four chickpea alternatives are becoming more common as brands explore new varieties.

Food Should Taste Good is known for its all natural tortilla chip varieties, and tortilla chips are often paired with hummus. Pita bread and raw vegetables are also common accompaniments.

But dipping is just one way to devour the savory spread.



"It can be served warm as a topping for poultry, it can be diluted down with lemon juice, honey and Greek yogurt as a salad dressing or it can be added to soups to enhance their nutrient value and to thicken them," adds Taub-Dix.

As we see more consumers swapping meals for snacks, we can expect to see more on-the-go, single serve packages of hummus. Also, watch for aseptic packaging that doesn't require refrigeration.

Like a lot of people, I am hooked on hummus – its health benefits, flavor varieties and serving options. It's hard to believe that when I first tried it twenty years ago, I could only find it in a dry mix packet!

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