

MEAT AND MEAT ALTERNATES

Current Requirements

- The serving of meat/meat alternate may be contained only in the main dish plus one other menu item.
- Dry beans and peas may count as a vegetable or as a meat alternate, but not as both in the same meal.

Foundations

The meat group supplies nutrients, including protein, zinc, iron, and B vitamins (thiamine, niacin, vitamin B6, and vitamin B12.)

Meat sources of these nutrients, such as beef, poultry, and fish are some of the best sources of iron. The iron from these foods is better absorbed by the body than the iron in plant foods

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend:

- Choose a variety of protein foods, which include seafood, lean meat and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Increase the amount and variety of seafood consumed by choosing seafood in place of some meat and poultry.

Menu Tips

- When writing menus, watch the fat content of the meat/meat alternate products.
- Choose a variety of meat/meat alternates over the course of the week: chicken, fish, beef, pork, soy products, nuts/seeds, and legumes are all acceptable.

Because of their high nutrient content, beans and peas may be considered as a vegetable and as a protein food.

Dried beans and dried peas are excellent sources of protein. They also provide other nutrients, such as iron and zinc, similar to seafood, meat, and poultry. They are excellent sources of dietary fiber and nutrients such as potassium and folic acid, which also are found in other vegetables.

How do we choose lean meats?

Choose meat cuts that are low in fat and ground beef that is extra lean (at least 90 percent lean). Trim fat from meat and remove poultry skin before cooking or eating. Try grilling, broiling, poaching, or roasting. These cooking methods do not add extra fat. Drain fat from all meats after cooking. While added trans fats are no longer permitted in school meals, naturally occurring trans fats in meat/meat alternates are acceptable.



Using USDA Foods

The USDA Foods Program offers a wide variety of lean meats for schools such as chicken fajita strips, ground beef, turkey, and reduced-fat cheese.

Alaska Options

Alaskan options include moose, venison, bison, salmon, pollock, and cod.