



# Just the Facts!

## Serve More Dry Beans and Peas for Healthier School Meals

### KEY ISSUES:

- Beans and peas (legumes) are an excellent source of fiber, which helps children feel full longer. As part of an overall healthy diet, beans and peas help to lower the risk of heart disease.
- Beans and peas:
  - are excellent sources of plant protein.
  - provide other nutrients such as iron, potassium, folate, and zinc.
  - are naturally low in fat and sodium.
  - have no saturated fat or cholesterol.
- The meal patterns require schools to offer foods from the beans and peas (legumes) vegetable subgroup to all students at lunch each week. The minimum offering is at least ½ cup weekly.
- Beans and peas can be counted in school meals as either a vegetable or a meat alternate, but may not count for both components in the same meal.

**W**e know beans are good for us, but many people don't realize how delicious they taste! Beans are an inexpensive protein option that can boost the nutritional content of school meals. Beans are versatile, too. Whether served as a vegetarian option or served with meats, poultry, fish, or cheese, beans complement the meal. Find creative ways to add more beans to school meals! For example, try savory pinto beans and salsa in a chef salad, or add red beans to a whole-grain rice pilaf!

Dry beans and peas are mature forms of legumes, which are plants that have pods with rows of seeds inside. Some popular varieties include pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, lentils, split peas, and garbanzo beans (chickpeas). Keep in mind that some beans and peas, such as green beans, string beans, green peas, snap peas, and baby green lima beans, are not considered dry beans or peas.

Easy ways to  
follow the 2010  
Dietary Guidelines for  
Americans

### Recipe for Success

- **Choose the easiest form!** Use canned, precooked beans to simplify recipes (no soaking needed) and reduce cooking times. Purchase canned beans labeled "no salt added" or "low sodium." If these are not available, rinse and drain the canned beans to reduce the sodium content.
- **Power up recipes** with more beans. Add beans and peas when preparing casseroles, stews, and side dishes. Make chili more interesting by combining kidney and white beans.
- **Serve satisfying soups.** Attract students and teachers with low-sodium split pea, lentil, minestrone, or white bean soups. Use pureed beans to thicken soups and sauces.
- **Spice up your menus** with Southwest flair! Offer black bean enchiladas, low-fat refried beans, or tacos with whole pinto beans.

## USDA Foods Program

Order dry beans and peas uncooked in sealed bags or precooked in cans through the USDA Foods Program. USDA only offers low-sodium (140 mg per ½-cup serving) canned dry beans and peas. To check the list of available USDA Foods, go to the USDA Foods Toolkit at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/healthy/Professional.htm> to review the Foods Available List for Schools.

- **Have a bean taste-test!** Let students sample dishes that use beans and peas as a main ingredient. Some ideas include: lentil soup, taco pizza with refried beans, veggie burgers, or hummus.
- **Give bean dishes fun names** or have children name the dishes. Ideas include Cowboy Beans, Smashed Bean Burrito, and Chili Boat (chili served in a baked sweet potato).
- **Replace high-fat ranch dips with hummus** (puréed garbanzo beans). Serve hummus with fresh crisp vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, and cucumbers, cut into small, easy-to-eat shapes, or with whole-grain pita bread for a delicious high-fiber treat.
- **Spruce up the salad bar!** Offer canned garbanzo beans, red kidney beans, black beans, or a mixture of all three!
- **Use colorful garnishes** like diced fresh green pepper or red pepper rings to add eye appeal and showcase your favorite bean dishes.
- **Bring back a classic!** Pair baked beans as a side dish with oven-baked chicken to bring back memories of a summer cookout!

## Messages for Students

- **Discover the magic in beans!** Try adding ½ cup of beans to your favorite soups and side dishes. Beans are naturally low in fat and provide some of the iron and potassium your body needs.
- **Try a great-tasting hummus dip** (made from puréed garbanzo beans) with vegetables or whole-wheat pita bread for a delicious snack.

## Make your meal or snack pop with flavor!

- Wrap black beans in a tortilla with low-fat cheese and salsa for a satisfying meal!
- Try a great-tasting hummus dip (made from puréed garbanzo beans) with vegetables or whole-wheat pita bread for a delicious snack.

## Did You Know?

- **Beans are high in protein.** They can be a great vegetarian entrée or side dish.
- **Rinsing and draining precooked canned beans** reduces the sodium content. Or, soak and cook bagged dry beans without adding any salt.
- **Beans and peas provide an excellent source of fiber,** magnesium, folate, iron, and zinc. Americans often do not get enough of these nutrients.

## For More Information:

**Team Nutrition** (<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov>)  
**USDA Choose MyPlate** ([www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov))  
**Let's Eat for the Health of It** (<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/letseat.html>)  
**Better With Beans (Legumes)** (<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20120102044212.pdf>)  
**Changing the Scene – Improving the School Nutrition Environment** (<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/changing.html>)  
**Fruits and Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More** ([http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/fv\\_galore.html](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/fv_galore.html))

