

In our work collaborating with services on their canteen menus, we have noted that it can be more challenging for services to provide adequate variety and amounts of foods from the lean meats and alternatives group.

The most common reasons for this include:

- Food safety concerns with preparing raw meat and poultry onsite
- Not having adequate refrigerator storage
- Inadequate cooking equipment
- Costs of these foods are high for the bulk amount that needs to be prepared

This factsheet aims to provide more information and solutions to assist with menu planning that includes a variety of foods from the lean meats and alternatives food group.

Lean Meat and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans

What foods ARE included in this food group?

- Lean meats like beef, lamb, pork
- Chicken
- Eggs
- Fish and seafood (canned and fresh)
- Legumes including tofu, chickpeas, lentils and kidney beans
- Nuts and seeds

What foods are NOT included in this food group?

- Ham
- Bacon
- Processed meats like salami, devon and chicken roll
- Sausages

These are all discretionary foods high in saturated fat and added salt and are best avoided

Overcoming challenges

Food safety and preparing meat and poultry

Preparing meat and poultry-based dishes is possible provided that staff involved with food preparation and serving have a thorough understanding of safe food handling. Key points to remember:

- ✓ Wash your hands frequently when preparing any type of meat, fish, or poultry.
- ✓ Avoid cross contamination by using separate utensils and cutting boards when handling raw meat.
- ✓ Keep raw meat separate from other ingredients that will not be cooked like vegetables, fruit or grains.
- ✓ Use a probe thermometer when cooking meat and poultry to ensure it reaches an internal temperature of at least 75 degrees Celsius.
- ✓ Ensure all eggs are thoroughly cooked until the yolk and white are set.

Cold storage

Adequate cold storage is vital to ensuring all perishable food remains safe. Overpacked and crowded refrigerators do not allow cold air to circulate around food effectively. This means that food and drinks may not be kept cold enough under 5 degrees Celsius placing them in the temperature danger zone. Keeping fridge temperature records is important to be able to monitor whether cold foods are being stored safely.

Grocery shopping and ordering for the canteen is often scheduled for one day a week or fortnight meaning that fridges can be very full at times. To minimise this, consider whether items on your menu cycle could be balanced to ensure there is a mix of options that require cold storage and those that don't.

For meat and poultry menu items, consider timing these with when the grocery shopping/delivery is due to ensure they are prepared and used up quickly. If refrigerator space is not adequate, raw meat can be frozen until required and defrosted on a drip tray on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator.

Cooking Equipment

Simple cooking equipment that doesn't require a lot of storage space is all that's needed to prepare a range of protein rich menu items. A large electric frypan can be used to prepare a range of bulk cooked dishes like bolognese or Mexican mince, scrambled eggs, homemade baked bean or fried rice with chicken.

Getting more lean meats and alternatives on your canteen menu

Budget

To keep your menu in budget, offer a range of foods from the lean meats and alternatives group. Eggs, tofu, tinned beans and canned fish are all economical options that can be incorporated into child friendly menu items (see list below). When using meat or poultry, consider ways to stretch out amount needed in a recipe to reduce the total cost. For example, bolognese mince can be made with a combination of mince and tinned lentils for a high protein and fibre sauce.

Quick ideas to boost lean meats and alternatives on your menu:

- ✓ Offer tinned tuna/salmon as a filling in wraps and sandwiches
- ✓ Try falafel balls on wraps or as an addition to veggie and dip platters
- ✓ Offer hummus or a white bean-based dip as a spread on crackers or with veggie sticks
- ✓ Roasted chickpeas are a crunchy snack that can be prepared by baking tinned chickpeas that have been drained and rinsed. Spray with a little olive oil and season with spices
- ✓ Add black beans or baked beans to cheese quesadillas
- ✓ Add white cannellini beans to pasta sauce
- ✓ Rice paper rolls with thinly sliced tofu, chicken, tuna mix or sliced boiled eggs
- ✓ Zucchini slice or frittata squares made with an egg base are great for breakfast or a savoury snack
- ✓ Bulk prepare basic savoury mince that can be converted to bolognese with the addition of tomato puree, or Mexican mince with spices and black beans.