



Using healthier cooking methods to prepare wholesome meats and meat alternates supports better nutrition, helps schools meet sodium and added sugars limits, improves meal quality and meets one of the goals of the [USDA Pledge for Healthier School Meals](#).

Key Pledge Tips

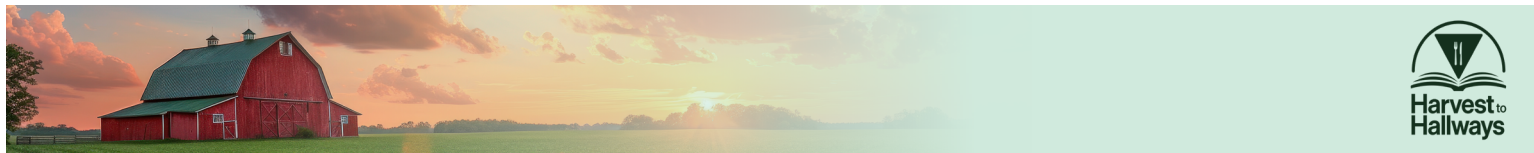
- **Avoid deep frying and breaded items.** Deep fried foods add unnecessary fat and sodium.
- **Limit breaded meats.** These often contain refined starches, additives, and added sugars.
- **Use healthier cooking methods.** Replace deep fried or breaded items with baked or roasted alternatives.
- **Prioritize whole-muscle meats instead of heavily processed options.** Offer roasted chicken, grilled meat strips, baked pork loin, or ground meats.
- **Create your own seasoning blends and sauces.** This helps to reduce added sugars, sodium, and chemical additives.
- **Include a variety of protein foods.** Prepare beans, peas, lentils, and tofu with healthy cooking methods.

Healthy Cooking Methods

Choose cooking methods that enhance flavor without relying on excess fat, sodium, or sugar. Combine lean meats and meat alternates with vegetables and whole grains for balanced meals.

- **Bake:** Preserves texture in chicken, pork, and other protein foods.
- **Roast:** Ideal for certain cuts of beef, chicken, fish, and pork to bring out the natural flavors.
- **Broil:** High heat method for quick browning.
- **Steam:** Maintains moisture and flavor.
- **Sauté, Pan Fry, or Stir Fry:** Quickly cook meat and meat alternates at high temperatures in a pan.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.



Simple Meats and Meat Alternates Menu Ideas

Check out the following recipes tested by schools and approved by students. They include crediting information. Try them out using local foods.

State Developed Recipes

- [Bison and Lentil Chili \(Montana\)](#)
- [Moroccan Spice Chicken and Rice \(Florida\)](#)
- [Salmon Tacos \(Washington\)](#)

USDA Developed Recipes

- [Gochujang Tofu](#)
- [Mojo Pulled Pork](#)
- [Quinoa Bowl with Black Beans and Egg](#)

School Spotlights

Schools are offering healthier meats and meat alternates by using local ingredients and creating simple, tasty recipes through partnerships.

- Boston Public Schools in Massachusetts and Portland Public Schools in Maine partnered with Commonwealth Kitchen to develop a Field Fritter that featured yellow peas, a regenerative cover crop.
- Springville Griffith Institute in New York purchased raw and whole meats from local farms and processed, stored, and prepared it in the district's kitchens.
- South Portland Public School District in Maine partnered with the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association and Gulf of Maine Research Institute to develop value-added products that included fish mix to be used in scratch-cooked seafood dishes like a Spicy Sushi Bowl.

Try It Out!

The following activities will help schools to prepare meats and meat alternates using healthy cooking methods.

1. **Swap Challenge:** Do you currently serve breaded or fried items? If yes, list immediate alternatives that can be baked, roasted, broiled, or steamed.
2. **Harvest to Hallways:** Seek grants and local partners for equipment upgrades and procurement of local meats and plant-based proteins.
3. **Taste Test 'Try Day' Event:** Create a healthier version of a student favorite and ask students to choose the winner.
4. **Reflection Prompt:** Imagine using your school kitchen as a way to make a positive change: What equipment or additional training would help your kitchen staff prepare healthier meats and meat alternates?

Helpful Tools

- [Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#)
- [Eat Real Food Toolkit](#)
- [Crediting Meats/Meat Alternates in Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Tips for Procuring Whole Foods](#)
- [Methods for Healthy Cooking](#)
- [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Prioritize Protein Foods](#)
- [Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)
- [Offering Meats and Meat Alternates at School Breakfast](#)

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.