



# Just the Facts

## Vary Your Vegetables for Healthier School Meals

### KEY ISSUES:

- Vegetables are rich in some of the key nutrients that kids fall short on, including potassium, fiber, folate, and magnesium.
- People who eat a variety of vegetables may have a decreased risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.
- The meal patterns require schools to offer a variety of vegetables during the week. Vegetables are divided into five subgroups: dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other vegetables.
- Schools must offer students in grades K-8 at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of vegetables every day, and students in grades 9-12 at least 1 cup of vegetables daily.
- Start a farm-to-school program to obtain fresh produce locally. To get started, go to: [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/)

**W**ant to add more color, crunch, and flavor to your menus? Offering a wide variety of vegetables provides a quick-and-easy way to make school meals pop with dazzling eye appeal and help children get the nutritional benefits they need. By eating more vegetables, students develop lifelong habits that promote good health!

### Recipe for Success

Easy ways to  
follow the 2010  
Dietary Guidelines for  
Americans

#### Go for variety!

- Offer different veggies every day, and include servings in each of these groups over a week:
  - **Dark green:** broccoli, spinach, romaine lettuce, and other dark leafy greens
  - **Red/Orange:** acorn and butternut squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes
  - **Beans and Peas (Legumes):** black beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, split peas, pinto beans, and white beans
  - **Starchy:** corn, green peas, green lima beans, and potatoes
  - **Others:** cauliflower, celery, cabbage, mushrooms, green beans, and iceberg lettuce

#### Boost the nutritional value!

- Offer plenty of raw veggies with the peel for extra fiber and cut into easy-to-eat sizes.
- Use herbs or no-salt spice mixes instead of butter, margarine, or cream sauces to season vegetable dishes and to lower saturated fat, sodium, and calories.
- Buy canned vegetables labeled “no-salt added” or choose lower sodium products.
- Use frozen vegetables that do not contain added fats, sugars, and sodium; they have just as many nutrients as fresh and are an affordable option when some fresh vegetables are out of season and cost more.

## USDA Foods Program

You can stretch your food budget and ensure high quality by ordering a wide variety of vegetables through the USDA Foods Program and the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. To learn more information about the DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, go to [www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/dod/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/dod/). USDA only offers low-sodium or no-salt-added canned vegetables through the USDA Foods Program. Schools can also order frozen vegetables as an additional no-salt-added option. To check the list of vegetables available through the USDA Foods Program, 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.

### Add more veggies to meals and snacks!

- **Prepare veggies in different ways.** For example, make a rainbow vegetable stir-fry, crunchy coleslaw, or a chicken Caesar salad.
- **Add diced carrots or zucchini** into meatloaf, casseroles, or soup. Include chopped vegetables in pasta sauce, pizza, or lasagna.
- **Include cooked dry beans or peas** in flavorful mixed dishes. Add extra beans to casseroles or minestrone soup. Or, use white beans in your favorite chili recipe.
- **Offer garbanzo beans** or kidney beans on a salad bar.

### Make vegetables more appealing!

- **Entice your students** with colorful and tasty fresh vegetables in small, easy-to-eat shapes: baby carrots or carrot sticks, green and red pepper slices, grape tomatoes, broccoli or cauliflower florets, and sliced zucchini and yellow squash.
- **Have taste tests and offer samples** encourage students to try different vegetables and vote for their favorites.
- **Add color to lettuce mix** with carrot slices or strips, shredded red cabbage, or spinach leaves.
- **Serve low-fat dressing** yogurt dip, hummus, or nut butters with raw veggies.



### Did You Know?

- **It's important to rinse all vegetables** before cutting, preparing, or eating them. Under clean, cold, running water, rub them briskly with your hands or a vegetable brush to remove dirt and surface micro-organisms. Pat dry with a paper towel after washing.
- **Remember to keep vegetables separate** from raw meat, poultry, and seafood while receiving, storing, or preparing them.

### Messages for Students

- **Eat a rainbow** of colorful vegetables at lunch!
- **Craving a crunchy snack?** Grab raw veggies and low-fat dip for a delicious treat!
- **Try a new veggie** once a week—at home or at school.

### 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>)  
**Fruits and Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More** ([http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/fv\\_galore.html](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/fv_galore.html))  
**Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Fruits & Veggies: More Matters** ([www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov))  
**Changing the Scene – Improving the School Nutrition Environment** (<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/changing.html>)

