

5 SIMPLE STEPS TO SUCCESSFULLY SERVING SEAFOOD IN SCHOOLS

Seafood, including fish and shellfish, is an important part of a well-balanced diet. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American Heart Association both recommend people consume seafood at least twice per week.^{1,2} Seafood is a natural source of omega-3s — good fats that have been shown to be beneficial at every age. They promote growth, development and heart health.^{3,4} Follow these simple steps to add more seafood into your school meals.

*Delicious, kid-friendly
seafood is simple*

STEP 1: Plan it! Put seafood on the menu

Seafood is gaining popularity, making it a trendy addition to your menu. Seafood can also be used to meet the National School Lunch Program guidelines and credits as a meat/meat alternate.

There are many kid-friendly seafood recipes your students will love.

- Take 'Taco Tuesday' to a new level — offer fish tacos with crunchy slaw
- Help students explore a taste of the sea with Alaska pollock burgers
- Change it up with fish and chips, instead of chicken tenders
- Make a vegetable side dish mainstream — combine canned tuna, fresh tomatoes, bell peppers and an olive oil dressing for a simple entrée

STEP 2: Buy it! Seafood in quantity

Frozen and canned fish are available year-round. Fresh varieties are available based on the season. Look for products that are once-frozen or canned for optimal taste and ease in preparation. Seafood is delicate — when buying frozen, look for products that have not been previously cooked.

The USDA Foods Available List offers four different seafood options. Other varieties of seafood are periodically available from the USDA, or can be ordered through your foodservice distributor.

ITEM	WBSCM ID	PACK SIZE	PORTION	NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM CREDITING ⁵⁻⁸
Alaska Pollock, Frozen	110601	49.5 lb. block	2.6 oz.	2 oz. meat/meat alternate
Alaska Pollock, Whole Grain-Rich Breaded Sticks, Frozen	110851	8/5 lb. or 4/10 lb. package	4 oz.	2 oz. meat/meat alternate 1 oz. whole grain
Catfish, Whole Grain-Rich Breaded Fillet Strips, Frozen	100201	4/10 lb. package	2 oz.	1 oz. meat/meat alternate
Tuna, Chunk Light, Canned	100195	6/66.5 oz. can	1 oz. drained	1 oz. meat/meat alternate

For the most accurate crediting, refer to the label on your purchased product.



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STEP 3: Keep it Fresh and Safe! *Control receiving and preparing*

Most seafood is delivered frozen or canned. This allows for easy storage until you are ready to prepare it.

- Frozen fish should arrive completely frozen in an air-tight package, at 32°F or lower. The fish should have no discoloration, ice crystals or odor. Store frozen fish immediately in the freezer (0°F or lower). When ready to use, thaw unbreaded fish products overnight in the refrigerator, as part of the cooking process, or in cold, running water. Breaded fish products must be cooked from frozen.
- Canned fish, like all other canned goods, should be inspected for dents and bulging. Store between 50°F and 70°F. Pre-chill unopened cans of tuna for cold salads and sandwiches. Keep open cans of fish out of the temperature danger zone.

When purchasing fresh seafood, it should arrive with an internal temperature of 41°F or below. The fish should be firm with no discoloration or odor. Store fresh fish below 41°F.

STEP 4: Get Kids Hooked! *Create lifelong healthy habits*

Host promotions to get students excited about trying and eating seafood:

- **Host a Try it Tuesday**
Offer samples of new seafood menu items and have students vote to select the recipe added to the menu cycle
- **Throw a themed lunch**
Plan 'Aloha Day' to feature new seafood recipes with Hawaiian flair. Choose creative names for the dishes and use decorations to transform your cafeteria
- **Have a recipe naming contest**
Ask students to name your new seafood dishes
- **Designate one day of the week to serve fish**
Students will look forward to having their favorite seafood dishes
- **Form a "Student Lunch Council"**
Create a group of students to help develop and taste-test new recipe ideas and give insight on new seafood menu items

STEP 5: Dish it up! *Successfully serving seafood*

Food safety and quality are top-of-mind when serving any dish, but are especially important when seafood is on the menu. For the best quality, cook fish dishes just before service to an internal temperature outlined in manufacturer directions. Breaded products should be crisp on the outside, and moist and flaky on the inside. Fillets should be opaque in color and moist.

To maintain the quality of fish, consider marinating unbreaded products before cooking and covering fillets during baking.

For fish dishes prepared the day before service, such as fish chowder, reheat seafood dishes to an internal temperature of 165°F for 15 seconds. Limit the amount of time fish is hot held to maintain the quality of the meal. Fish should be held at 135°F or higher for no more than 2 hours.

The best way to be sure you are serving the tastiest product is to test your recipe. Make a small batch, taste the recipe immediately after cooking and then after hot holding. Make adjustments to get the best product before adding to the menu for students. Consider sampling the tested recipe and collecting student feedback.

REFERENCES:

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3. Simopoulos AP. Omega-3 fatty acids in health and disease and in growth and development. *Am J Clin Nutr* 1991; 54:438-63.
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5. U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Child Nutrition (CN) Label Verification Report*. July 2017. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/usdausdc-authorized-labels-and-manufacturers>
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7. U.S. Department of Agriculture. U.S.D.A. *Product Information Sheet For Child Nutrition Programs.100201 Catfish, Breaded Filet Strips, Oven Ready Frozen*. August 2014. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/nslp-material-fact-sheets-meatmeat-alternates>.
8. U.S. Department of Agriculture. U.S.D.A. *Product Information Sheet For Child Nutrition Programs. 100195 Tuna, Chunk Light, Canned*. July 2017. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/nslp-material-fact-sheets-meatmeat-alternates>.

Food Safety Considerations

- Cook seafood to an internal temperature of 145°F or as directed by manufacturer instructions — it will be moist and flaky. Fish cooks quickly; prepare right before service to maximize the quality. If you have to hot hold the dish, hold it above 135°F to keep it safe. Before serving, test how your recipe tastes after being hot held.
- Handle raw fish similar to raw meat and poultry by keeping it separate from cooked fish and other foods. Avoid cross-contamination of raw and cooked seafood. Use color coordinated cutting boards and separate preparing and serving containers.
- Avoid cross-contact to keep students with fish and shellfish allergies safe. Always use separate cooking and serving utensils for seafood.