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Meat and Bean Group: Are You Prepared?

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Knowing how to prepare food can make the difference between a great meal and a bad one. It can also save you money.

**Meat and Poultry**
- Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator or, as a last resort, under cold running water. If thawing in a microwave oven, refer to the manufacturer’s directions.
- Cook meat and poultry between 325º F and 350º F. High temperatures and overcooking cause meat to shrink and become dry.
- Cheaper cuts of meat are just as nutritious as the most expensive cut of meat but may require more preparation time. To make meat tender, use a moist cooking method and cook at low temperatures:
  * Brown meat over medium heat.
  * Add liquid: water, tomato juice, or broth.
  * Cover pan. Cook over low to medium heat until tender, or bake at 325º F.
  OR
  * Tenderize meat by grinding or chopping into small pieces.

**Fish**
- Thaw frozen fish in the refrigerator.
- Fish is very tender. Cook just until the flesh is white and flakes easily when touched with a fork.

**Dry Beans**
- Beans need to be soaked to soften the skin. Split peas and lentils need no soaking. They soften in cooking.
- 1 cup dry beans makes 2½ cups cooked.
- Adding salt to the water while soaking prevents beans from softening. Add salt after cooking.
- If beans foam, add oil to the pan and leave the lid off.
- Older beans take longer to cook than new beans. Don’t mix the two.
Cooking Dry Beans

**Overnight soak**
1. Cover beans with unsalted water.
2. Cover pan and let stand overnight.
3. Drain beans.
4. Add fresh water.
5. Add meat, if desired. Cook until tender, adding water if necessary.
6. Add salt to taste.

**Quick soak**
1. Cover beans with unsalted water.
2. Boil 2 minutes in uncovered pan.
3. Take off heat. Cover pan and let stand 1 hour.
4. Drain beans.
5. Add fresh water.
6. Add meat, if desired. Cook until tender, adding water if necessary.
7. Add salt to taste.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooking Times for Dry Beans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kidney, pinto, navy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great northern, small, red, and white</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split peas, lentils (no presoak necessary)</td>
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</tbody>
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**Tip:** If a recipe includes tomatoes, add them during the last 15 minutes of cooking time.

Written by Kathy Daly-Koziel, former EFNEP Coordinator

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