

A Ration Meal

Learning objective: To have students learn about emergency food rations and to reflect on nutrition.

Recommended grade level: Elementary school and up, Ages 6 - Adult

Subjects: social studies/global issues, cooking & home economics, health & physical education wellness

Skills: cooking (if they are preparing the food), critical thinking, health and wellness, math

Number of participants: Unlimited

Materials: stove or hot plate, 2 large pots with lids, strainer, measuring cups and spoons, large bowls, skillet or electric griddle, recipes (included)

- Ingredients for beans*: dried red beans, water, onions
- (optional), bay leaf, pepper, salt, vegetable oil
- Ingredients for rice: water, rice
- Ingredients for flat bread*: whole wheat flour, oil, warm water, salt

*See recipes for amounts

Activity

Host a ration meal at lunch hour or another time. This activity can be as simple or as creative as you wish. You could have a ration meal for your class, youth group, or invite the whole community to an evening event.

The following steps are simply a guideline.

- Check to see if there are any food allergies or intolerances for which you must adapt the recipe.
- Prepare the food according to the recipes. The beans must be soaked overnight and boiled for at least 2 hours. The dough must also have

time to rise. If appropriate, students may help prepare the food. The dough for the flat bread may be made in advance and prepared just prior to the meal.

- If held at lunch, ask students to refrain from eating a mid-morning snack.
- Serve the food. Each person should receive approximately 3/4 cup of beans, 1/2 cup rice (optional) and 1 small flat bread (optional). (Note: both the rice and flat bread are optional, but at least one should be served with the beans.)

Background Information for Educators

WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY FOOD RATION?

It is a fixed amount of food given to a person or household in emergency situations or when sufficient food is not accessible. Rations are often distributed by aid groups or government agencies at refugee or internally displaced persons camps or to communities who are facing severe food shortages.



A typical ration of 450g cereal, 50g pulses, 50g oil, and 5g iodized salt

Rations change from situation to situation. Sometimes food is distributed 'wet' (already cooked), other times 'dry' rations are given, which people cook on their own. The Foodgrains Bank generally provides dry rations with enough quantity to cover a period of time (i.e. to feed a family for a month), though wet rations are given when appropriate (i.e. a school lunch program).

The types of food in a ration vary from place to place, but the general quantities stay the same. The World Health Organization sets out that a typical daily ration should provide about 2100 calories and consist of about 450 grams of cereal (flour, rice, etc.), 50 grams of pulses (beans, lentils, etc.), 50 grams of oil, and 5 grams of iodized salt per person. Often these are fortified with vitamins and other micronutrients.

WHY HOLD A RATION MEAL?

Many Canadians live in a world in which food is abundant. Holding a ration meal introduces the concept of a food ration. Also, it will give participants an idea of the quantity of food as well as the type of foods and nutrients in an emergency food ration.

The way many of us eat in Canada is much different than how many people around the world eat. Most Canadians have access to a variety of foods from which they can choose. If we don't feel like eating one type of food, we can easily find another type which we want to eat. This is not the

case in many places around the world where people have staple foods which they typically eat frequently—everyday or even for every meal. Because their ration is often expected to last a month, recipients of rations eat the same foods throughout that time, though they may also eat vegetables and fruits or trade with friends and family for other types of foods.

IS THIS MEAL A TRUE RATION?

Rations vary from situation to situation, person to person. A typical ration consists of about 450 grams of cereal (flour, rice, etc.), 50 grams of pulses (beans, lentils, etc.), 50 grams of oil, and 5 grams of iodized salt per person per day. Therefore, what is proposed as a meal in this activity would be approximately half of a person's daily allowance.

Dry food rations provided by the Foodgrains Bank are generally given out for one month at a time. Therefore, a person may eat a little more one day and a little less the next. Or people may share food with others who do not have enough. Sometimes, people will have vegetables or spices that they can add to the meal.

Young children and pregnant / nursing women, may also receive a 'supplementary ration' which is not a full ration but aims to add additional nutrients to their diets, beyond what they normally eat on a daily basis.



Recipes

BEANS

2 cups dried red beans
4 cups of water
1 large onion, chopped (optional)
1 bay leaf or a pinch of spices
pepper, to taste
salt, to taste
1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
3 cups rice, plus water for soaking

Method:

- Soak the beans overnight in cold water; drain.
- Heat the beans in about 4 cups of water, add all ingredients except salt, and boil for at least 2 hours.
- When beans are tender, mash them up with a tablespoon of oil and the salt.
- Serve on boiled rice or with flat bread.

Serves 5-6

FLAT BREAD

2 cups whole-wheat flour
2 tablespoons oil
3/4 to 1 cup warm water
1/2 teaspoon salt

Method:

- Mix the flour and oil together using your hands.
- Stir the salt into the water and add the water to the flour a little at a time, until you have a soft, kneadable ball.
- Remove to a floured surface and knead for 8-10 minutes, or until smooth and elastic.
- Remove the dough to a lightly greased bowl, cover, and rest for at least 30 minutes (and up to 2 hours).
- Return the dough to a floured work surface. Roll the dough into a long piece and cut it into 12 separate balls.
- Dust the dough balls with a little flour and roll each one out into a very thin round about 6 inches in diameter.
- Heat an ungreased, heavy skillet over medium heat. Add a dough round and press down gently with a spatula or the back of a spoon.

- Cook until lightly browned, flip and brown on the second side. Repeat with all rounds.

Makes 12

Pre-Meal Activities

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Additional information is given for group leaders.

What do you think is meant by the term 'emergency food ration'?

See background information.

Who do you think receives emergency food rations from aid groups, like Canadian Foodgrains Bank?

People in other countries who are in crisis because they don't have access to food. Reasons for this include drought, war and conflict, flooding, etc.

Do you think that rations are a good solution to the problem of hunger?

Rations are one of many important responses. Rations are useful in that they help people who are in crisis, who, without food, may not survive or may get very ill. Other solutions are also needed to prevent people from needing to rely on rations. Other solutions could include food security projects which help people produce more food in a more effective way so that food can be stored for future use, livelihood projects to help people increase their income in order to purchase food, finding a solution to a conflict which is preventing people from accessing food, or changing policies so that food is more accessible.

TABLE GRACES

For food in a world where many walk in hunger;
for faith in a world where many walk in fear;
for friends in a world where many walk alone;
we give thanks.

Are rations given out in Canada?

Canadian Foodgrains Bank does not provide rations in Canada. However, food banks and soup kitchens serve people in Canada who do not have enough food for themselves or their families. Many of the member organizations of Foodgrains Bank support local food banks and soup kitchens.

FOR FAITH-BASED GROUPS:
Discuss What does it mean, “give us today our daily bread”?

VISUALIZING EXERCISE

Trigger Warning: Be aware that some participants may find this story difficult to hear or process, especially those who have lived through conflict or extreme food insecurity.

Have the group members close their eyes. Read the following text to them. Pause between sentences to give them time to think.

Sarah lives in a country where war has been going on for several year. Before the war, she lived a peaceful and normal life with her husband and five children. Her husband worked as a language teacher in a local school.

When the war started, Sarah and her family were forced to leave their home. They took what they could with them, including money and food. They found shelter in the caves of nearby mountains; this was in part to protect them from air raids. Sarah’s family lived in a cave for four months with other families from their village. The families were scared to leave the cave for fear of bombs that may drop from the sky. The families shared their yet could still only manage to eat one meal a day. Eventually they ran out of food.

Sarah’s family was left without food and without an income. They were scared to return home for fear of being hurt or killed, but they had no choice. Sarah needed to find help to feed her children. They returned to their village and relied on what neighbours and family could spare.

As part of an emergency response by Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Sarah and her family were provided flour, beans, sugar, salt and oil to help them through their crisis.

Keep your eyes closed. Think about how you would feel if you were in Sarah’s situation and could not feed your family. How do you think she felt when she was able to provide even a simple meal to her family? Can you think of other situations, maybe that you have heard about in the news, where people can’t access enough food for their families?

Post-Meal Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the meal? The food?
2. Do you think the meal would have tasted differently if you had not eaten for a long time prior? Do you think that you would eat it quickly or savour it slowly?
3. Do you think that you would appreciate food more if it was not readily available?
4. Do you think that two meals a day like this would be enough to sustain you for a month? Would you be satisfied? Why or why not?
5. Do you think about the nutritional value of the foods that you eat? Do you think that it is important to do so?