



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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### River Regional dietitians sponsor canned food drive

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March is National Nutrition Month, and registered dietitians in the Alabama Department of Public Health are joining dietitians around the River Region in sponsoring a canned food drive. The food collected will be provided to the Montgomery Area Food Bank.

“The foods donated through this food drive will become a part of a larger picture, one that makes the difference between hunger and health to families across the state,” Miriam Gaines, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, Alabama Department of Public Health, said.

Canned foods can be as nutritious as cooked from fresh, according to research, and are often overlooked as a convenient source of nutrition. Canned foods are an easy way to add vitamins and minerals to your diet. In addition, canned foods are available without added sodium or sugar and can be preservative-free.

These are some benefits of canned foods:

- Canned fruit is convenient to add to salads or to use as a snack. Choose fruits packed in their own juice, water or 100 percent fruit juice. Try to avoid syrup, even light syrup, which adds empty calories.
- Canned vegetables are convenient because they are ready so quickly. However, they may have used sodium or salt in canning which can add unwanted sodium to the diet. Selecting the “no salt added” versions is healthier. Rinsing the vegetables before heating them is another way to reduce the sodium content.
- Canned meat can also be a part of the meal pattern. Some canned meats, such as tuna packed in water, have the American Heart Association symbol on the can, making choosing the healthier version easier.

Canning uses high temperatures and sterile containers destroy organisms that would cause spoilage. This makes the food safe for an extended time period. The high temperature cooks the food in the can once it is sealed, which locks in nutrients and also gives cans their long shelf life without the need for preservatives. Canned soups, stews and vegetables only need heating since they have already been cooked beforehand.

“It’s the canning process itself which is the natural preservative,” Anna Patterson, R.D., Montgomery District Dietetic Association president, said. “Store canned food in a cool, dry place. Use a clean, non-rusty can opener and wipe the top of the can before opening. Open cans are not designed to store food. Be sure to transfer unused contents of a can to a safe storage container and place in the refrigerator immediately.”

In 2012, the Montgomery Area Food Bank distributed approximately 19 million pounds of food across 35 counties and served over 330,000 people.

For more information, contact Molly Killman, M.S., R.D., L.D., Assistant Director, Nutrition and Physical Activity Division, at (334) 206-5646.