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Lunch Meal Pattern (Grades K-12)

Overview

Program operators of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are required to use meal patterns and dietary specifications established by U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop menus and serve meals to students. The meal patterns were revised in April 2020 to reflect the overturn of the meal pattern flexibilities of 2018 by the U.S. District Court. Starting with the 2020–2021 school year (SY), schools operating the NSLP and School Breakfast Program, must once again follow the 2012 meal pattern requirements. The updates include: flavored milk, if offered, may only be non-fat; all grains served must be whole-grain rich; and school lunches and breakfasts offered must meet Target 2 weekly sodium levels.

Meal Pattern Requirements

Measurement abbreviations: Cup = c, Ounce Equivalent = oz eq, Calories = kcal, Grams = g, and Milligrams = mg

Minimum Amount of Food^a Per Week


Meal Components	Grades K–5	Grades K–8	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Fruits^b	2½ c (½ c per day)	2½ c (½ c per day)	2½ c (½ c per day)	5 c (1 c per day)
Vegetables^b	3¾ c (¾ c per day)	3¾ c (¾ c per day)	3¾ c (¾ c per day)	5 c (1 c per day)
Dark Green^c	½ c	½ c	½ c	½ c
Red/Orange^c	¾ c	¾ c	¾ c	1¼ c
Beans and Peas (legumes)^c	½ c	½ c	½ c	½ c
Starchy^c	½ c	½ c	½ c	½ c
Other^{c,d}	½ c	½ c	½ c	¾ c

Additional Vegetables to Reach Total^e	1 c	1 c	1 c	1½ c
Grain Minimums^{*,f}	8-9 oz eq (1 oz per day)	8-9 oz eq (1 oz per day)	8-10 oz eq (1 oz per day)	10-12 oz eq (2 oz per day)
Meats/Meat Alternate Minimums[*]	8-10 oz eq (1 oz per day)	9-10 oz eq (1 oz per day)	9-10 oz eq (1 oz per day)	10-12 oz eq (2 oz per day)
Fluid Milk^g	5 c (1 c per day)	5 c (1 c per day)	5 c (1 c per day)	5 c (1 c per day)

Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week

Specifications	Grades K-5	Grades K-8	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Min-max calories^h	550-650 kcal	600-650 kcal	600-700 kcal	750-850 kcal
Saturated Fat (% of calories)^h	< 10%	< 10%	< 10%	< 10%
Sodium Target 2^{h,i}	≤ 935 mg	≤ 935 mg	≤ 1,035 mg	≤ 1,080 mg
Trans Fat^{h,j}	0 g	0 g	0 g	0 g

* U.S. Department of Agriculture has lifted the weekly maximums for grain and meat/meat alternates. The daily and weekly minimums for grains and meat/meat alternates still apply. The maximums are used as a guide for menu planning purposes only.

^a Food items included in each group and subgroup and amount equivalents as outlined in the most current [U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Buying Guide web page](#) .

^b One quarter cup of dried fruit counts as one half cup of fruit; one cup of leafy greens counts as one half cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100 percent full-strength. The minimum creditable serving for a fruit or vegetable is at least one eighth cup.

^c Larger amounts of these vegetables may be served.

^d This category consists of “Other Vegetables” as defined in Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR) Section 210.10(c)(2)(iii)(E). For the purposes of the National School Lunch Program, the “Other Vegetables” requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) vegetable subgroups as defined in 7 CFR Section 210.10(c)(2)(iii).

^e Any vegetable subgroup may be offered to meet the total weekly vegetable requirement.

^f All grains offered weekly must be whole grain rich.

^g At **least two** milk choices must be offered. Pasteurized, fluid types of milk that meet state and local standards and contain vitamins A and D at levels specified by the Food and Drug Administration must be offered. All milk must be fat-free or low-fat. Milk with higher fat content is not allowed. Fat-free fluid milk may be flavored or unflavored, and low-fat fluid milk must be unflavored. Low-fat or fat-free, lactose-free, and reduced-lactose fluid milk may also be offered.

^h Discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) may be added to the meal pattern if within the specifications for calories, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium. Food products and ingredients must contain zero grams of trans fat (less than 0.5 grams) per serving.

ⁱ Sodium Target 2 is effective from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2022 and is contained in 7 CFR, Section 210.10 (c).

^j Nutrition label of manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving.

Please note: For offer versus serve, every student must take ½ cup fruit and or vegetable or combination of both to count as a reimbursable meal.

Questions: Nutrition Services Division | 800-952-5609

Last Reviewed: Tuesday, December 1, 2020

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