



Nutrition Standards for School Meals

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update federal nutrition standards for school meals. The [updated rules](#) went into effect on July 1, 2012. The changes require:

More fruits and vegetables: Schools must offer students fruits and vegetables with every lunch and increase the portion sizes. Vegetable choices at lunch must include weekly offerings of: legumes, dark green, and red or orange vegetables. Every school breakfast must offer students a full cup of fruits or vegetables. Students are required to take at least one half-cup serving of fruits or vegetables with every school breakfast and lunch.

Whole grains: All grains offered with school meals must be whole grain-rich (at least 51% whole grain). *In some schools where certain whole grain foods are not well accepted by students (eg whole grain tortillas or brown rice), temporary waivers permit the service of select foods that do not meet this standard.**

Calorie limits: School meals must meet age-appropriate calorie minimums and maximums:

Grades	Breakfast	Lunch
K-5:	350-500 calories	550-650 calories
6-8:	400-550	600-700
9-12:	450-600	750-850

Sodium limits: Schools must gradually reduce sodium levels in school meals over a ten-year period to meet the following limits. *Due to challenges of meeting future sodium limits, USDA has retained Sodium Target 1 limits through the end of the 2018-19 school year.**

Sodium Reduction Target Timeline for School Meals

Grades	Target 1 (July 1, 2014)	Target 2 (July 1, 2017)	Final Target (July 1, 2022)
School Breakfast Program			
K-5:	≤540 mg	≤485 mg	≤430 mg
6-8:	≤600	≤535	≤470
9-12:	≤640	≤570	≤500
National School Lunch Program			
K-5:	≤1,230	≤935	≤640
6-8:	≤1,360	≤1,035	≤710
9-12:	≤1,420	≤1,080	≤740

Limits on unhealthy fat: Meals cannot contain added trans-fat and no more than 10 percent of calories can come from saturated fat.

Low-fat and fat-free milk: Every school meal offers one cup of fat-free or 1% milk. Flavored milk must be fat-free. To meet calorie limits, milk processors have developed flavored milk with less added sugar. *USDA recently provided schools the option to offer flavored, 1% milk.**

Free water: Free drinking water must be available in the cafeteria during lunch and breakfast.

[*USDA's 11/30/17 Interim Final Rule: Child Nutrition Program Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements](#)