

Topic: Lunch Meal Pattern At a Glance

Overview

By regulation, school meals must be based on the goals of the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. USDA sets school meal nutrition standards to ensure that schools offer students the right balance of fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, whole grains, and protein foods.

Requirements:

School Food Authorities (SFA's) must offer the food components and quantities required in the lunch meal pattern based on age/grade group served.

Age/grade groups are:

- K-5 (Kindergarten through 5th grade)
- 6-8 (6th through 8th grade)
- 9-12 (9th through 12th grade)

Note: The meal pattern requirements for K-5 and 6-8 grades overlap, so it is possible to meet both age/ grade requirements with a single menu if:

- daily and weekly requirements are be met.
- meals meet average weekly dietary specification for calories, saturated fat and sodium as specified in the meal patterns.

The standard meal pattern is based on a five day week with adjusted meal patterns based on shorter and longer weeks.

Lunch Meal Pattern: Based on a 5 Day Week			
	K-5	6-8	9-12
Meal Pattern:	Amount of Food Per Week (Minimum Per Day)		
Fruits (cups)	2 ½ (½)	2 ½ (½)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups)	3 ¾ (¾)	3 ¾ (¾)	5 (1)
Dark Green	½	½	½
Red/Orange	¾	¾	1 ¼
Beans/Peas (Legumes)	½	½	½
Starchy	½	½	½
Other	½	½	¾
Additional vegetables to Reach Weekly Total	1	1	1 ½
Grains (oz. equivalent)	8-9 (1)	8-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Meat/Meat Alternate (oz. equivalent)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Fluid Milk (cups)	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount			
Minimum-Maximum Calories	550-650	600-700	750-850
Sodium Interim Target 1 (SY 2023)	<1230mg	<1360mg	<1420mg
Sodium Interim Target 1A (SY 2024)	<1110mg	<1225mg	<1280mg
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)	<10	<10	<10
Trans fat: Label or manufacturer statement must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving			

Meal Pattern Components:

Meat/Meat Alternate:

Grades	Daily Minimum Requirement	Weekly Minimum Requirement
K-5	1 oz. equivalent	8 oz. equivalents
6-8	1 oz. equivalent	9 oz. equivalents
9-12	2 oz. equivalents	10 oz. equivalents

- SFA's serving Grades K-5 and 6-8 must offer more than the minimum daily amount to meet the weekly minimum requirement.
- The minimum meat/meat alternate amount that can contribute to the meal pattern is a 0.25 oz equivalent.
- Cooked dry beans or peas (legumes) may be counted as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate but not as both in the same meal

Grains:

Grades	Daily Minimum Requirement	Weekly Minimum Requirement
K-5	1 oz. equivalent	8 oz. equivalents
6-8	1 oz. equivalent	8 oz. equivalents
9-12	2 oz. equivalents	10 oz. equivalents

- SFA's must offer more than the minimum daily amount to meet the weekly requirement.
- The minimum grain amount that can contribute to the meal pattern is a 0.25 oz equivalent.
- Up to 2 oz. eq. of grain-based desserts may be credited towards the grains component per week.
- At least 80% of grains must be whole grain-rich and all other grain items offered must be enriched.

Fluid Milk:

Grades	Daily Minimum Requirement	Weekly Minimum Requirement
K-5	1 Cup	5 Cups
6-8	1 Cup	5 Cups
9-12	1 Cup	5 Cups

All milk must be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1% or less). Milk can be flavored or unflavored, provided that unflavored milk is offered at each meal service.

At least two types of milk must be offered.

Vegetables:

Grades	Daily Minimum Requirement	Weekly Minimum Requirement
K-5	$\frac{3}{4}$ Cup	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ Cups
6-8	$\frac{3}{4}$ Cup	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ Cups
9-12	1 Cup	5 Cups

- Full strength juice may be offered to meet up to one-half of the weekly vegetable requirement. All juice must be 100% juice.
- The minimum vegetable amount that can contribute to the meal pattern is a $\frac{1}{8}$ cup.
- Leafy green vegetables credit as one half the volume served. Ex. $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lettuce = $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable.
- Cooked dry beans or peas (legumes) may be counted as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate but not as both in the same meal.

The vegetable component consists of a variety of subgroups that must be offered over the week. SFA's must ensure that all students have the opportunity to select each of the vegetable subgroups over the week.

Vegetable Subgroups	K-5	6-8	9-12
Dark Green	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup
Red/Orange	$\frac{3}{4}$ Cup	$\frac{3}{4}$ Cup	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ Cups
Beans/Peas (Legumes)	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup
Starchy	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup
Other	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	$\frac{3}{4}$ Cup
Additional vegetables to meet total	1 cup	1 cup	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups

- The "Other vegetables" requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) vegetable subgroups
- Once the weekly vegetable subgroups have been met any vegetable subgroup may be offered to meet the total weekly vegetable required.

Fruit:

Grades	Daily Minimum Requirement	Weekly Minimum Requirement
K-5	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cups
6-8	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cups
9-12	1 Cup	5 Cups

- Menu planners may allow students to select more than the daily minimum serving for fruit if the dietary specifications for average lunches offered over the school week are met.
- Full strength juice may be offered to meet up to one-half of the weekly fruit requirement. All juice must be 100% juice.
- The minimum quantity that may be credited towards the fruit component is $\frac{1}{8}$ cup.
- Dry fruit credits as double the amount served. Ex. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried fruit = $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fruit.

Offer versus Serve at Lunch

Offer versus Serve (OVS) is a provision in the National School Lunch Program that allows students to decline some of the food offered. The goals of OVS are to reduce food waste in the school meals programs while permitting students to decline foods they do not intend to eat.

- Offer versus Serve (OVS) is required for lunches served in high school, but optional at elementary and middle schools.
- All five required food components must be offered to students in at least the minimum daily requirements.
- Students must be allowed to decline two of the five food components.
- Students must select at least three of the five food components including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable.
- Students, servers and cashiers must be able to identify what constitutes a reimbursable meal.
- Signage explaining what constitutes a reimbursable meal to students including the requirement to select at least 1/2 cup fruit or vegetables is must be posted at or close to the beginning of the service line.

Helpful Resources

[Five Day NSLP Meal Pattern Chart](#)

[Short and Long Week NSLP Meal Pattern Chart](#)

[Offer versus Serve Manual](#)

[Offer versus Serve Lunch Tip Sheet](#)

Regulatory Reference

[CFR 210.10](#) Meal Requirements for Lunches

[USDA Memo SP-05 2022](#) Meal Requirements Under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Questions and Answers for Program Operators

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Acronym Reference and Definitions

NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OVS	Offer versus Serve
SFA	School Food Authority
UDSA	United States Department of Agriculture