

The School Lunch Pattern for Various Age/Grade Groups

The United States Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program requires that portions of meal components be adjusted by age/grade group to better meet the food and nutritional needs of children according to their ages.

Quantities Required to Offer						
Food Components	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-4	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12	Specific Requirements
Meat or Meat Alternate (M/MA)			8 oz. eq./wk	9 oz. eq./wk	10 oz. eq./wk	Must be served in the main dish or as the main dish and only one other menu item.
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			9 oz. eq.*/wk			
Lean meat, poultry, fish	1 oz.	1 ½ oz.	1 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum	1 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum	2 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum	<p>Vegetable protein products, cheese, cheese alternate products, and enriched macaroni with fortified protein may be used to meet part of the meat/meat alternate requirement. Food and Nutrition Service Fact Sheets on each of these alternate foods give detailed instructions for use.</p>
Cheese	1 oz.	1 ½ oz.				
Large egg(s)	½	¾				
Cooked, dry beans or peas	¼ cup	3/8 cup				
Peanut butter (or any nut or seed butter)	2 Tbsp	3 Tbsp				
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts or seeds*	½ oz. = 50%	¾ oz. = 50%				
Yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened	4 oz. or ½ cup	6 oz. or ¾ cup				
Grains / Breads			8 oz. eq/wk	8 oz. eq/wk	10 oz. eq/wk	New: In grades K-12, 80% of the grains offered must be whole grain rich (WGR) or a blend of whole-grain meal and/or flour and enriched meal and/or flour of which at least 50 percent is whole grain. The remaining 50 percent or less of grains, if any, must be enriched.
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			8 oz. eq*/wk			
Servings of grains or breads must be whole-grain rich	5 per week at least ½ svg/day	8 per week at least 1 svg/day	1 oz. eq. per day minimum	1 oz. eq. per day minimum	2 oz. eq. per day minimum	<p>No more than ½ of the total requirement may be met with full-strength vegetable juice.</p> <p>In grades K-12 the vegetable subgroups need to be offered throughout the week. The amounts listed here are the minimum amount that must be offered during the week.</p>
Vegetable			¾ cup every day		1 cup every day	
Dark Green	1/2 cup either or	1/2 cup either or	½ cup every week		½ cup every week	
Red/Orange			¾ cup every week		1 ¼ cups every week	
Beans/Peas			½ cup every week		½ cup every week	
Starchy			½ cup every week		½ cup every week	
Other			½ cup every week		¾ cup every week	
Fruit			½ cup every day	½ cup every day	1 cup every day	No more than ½ of the total weekly requirement may be met with 100% full-strength fruit juice.
Milk (fluid offered as a beverage)	¾ cup (6 fl. oz)		½ pint (8 fl. oz)			In grades K-12, fluid milk must be 1% unflavored, or fat free flavored or unflavored.
Min. and Max. Calorie Ranges in an average 5-day week menu	517*		550-650	600-700	750-850	Menus for students ages 1-2 and ages 3-4 have a minimum calorie requirement of 517 calories averaged over the school week.
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			600-650			K-8 group sodium max = 1230mg.
New: Sodium Target 1: Effective July 1, 2022	≤ 1230		≤ 1360		≤ 1420	K-8 group sodium max = 1110 mg.
New: Sodium Interim Target 1A: Effective July 1, 2023	≤ 1110		≤ 1225		≤ 1280	K-8 group sodium max = 1110 mg.

*As listed in program guidance, these items may be used to meet no more than 50% of the requirement and must be combined in the meal with at least 50% of other meat or meat alternates (1 oz nuts/seeds = 1 oz of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish). ^Schools serving lunch 7 days per week should increase the weekly quantity by approximately 20% for each additional day. Food Buying Guide FNS Instruction 783-1, Rev. 2 Grains and Bread Instruction provide the information for the minimum weight of serving.

Commonly eaten vegetables in each vegetable subgroup

Dark Green Vegetables

- beet greens (canned, fresh or frozen)
- broccoli (fresh, slaw or frozen)
- collard greens (canned, fresh or frozen)
- dark green leafy lettuce
- kale (canned, fresh or frozen)
- mesclun/spring mix
- mustard greens (canned, fresh or frozen)
- romaine lettuce
- spinach (canned, fresh or frozen)
- turnip greens (canned, fresh or frozen)

Red & Orange vegetables

- winter squash (like acorn or butternut squash)
- carrots (canned, fresh or frozen)
- pumpkin (canned or fresh)
- red peppers
- salsa
- spaghetti sauce
- sweet potatoes
- tomato paste
- tomato puree
- tomatoes (crushed, diced, whole, stewed, cherry, whole) (canned, fresh or frozen)

Beans and peas

- baked beans, dry, canned (in sauce with pork, in sauce with bacon, vegetarian)
- bean soup
- black beans (Turtle beans), (mature, dry)
- black-eyed beans (or peas), (mature, dry)
- garbanzo beans (chickpeas), (mature, dry)
- great northern beans (dry, mature)
- kidney beans (dry, mature)
- lentils (dry, mature)
- navy beans (dry, mature)
- pea soup
- pinto beans (dry, mature)
- red bean (dry, mature)
- refried beans
- split peas (dry, mature)
- white beans (dry, mature)

Starchy vegetables

- corn (canned, fresh or frozen)
- cowpeas, field peas, pigeon peas or black-eyed peas (green or fresh)
- green peas (fresh or frozen)
- lima beans (green or frozen)
- potato products (hash browns, hashed patty, shredded, circles, mashed, french fries frozen rounds, potato skins, potato wedges, potato sticks)
- potatoes, dehydrated (diced, flake, granules, slices), (canned fresh or frozen)

Other vegetables

- asparagus (canned, fresh or frozen)
- avocado
- beets (canned, fresh, without tops or frozen)
- bell peppers (dehydrated, canned, fresh, or frozen)
- brussels sprouts (fresh or frozen)
- cabbage (Chinese, celery, green, red)
- cauliflower (fresh or frozen)
- celery (canned or fresh)
- cucumber
- eggplant
- green beans (flat Italian, French cut, whole) (canned, fresh or frozen)
- lettuce (iceberg; mixed greens; equal amounts of iceberg and romaine with shredded carrots and red cabbage; mostly iceberg, some romaine with shredded carrot and red cabbage; leaf)
- *mixed vegetables (broccoli and cauliflower; California blend; carrots, corn and green beans blend; peppers and onion; five vegetable blend, seven vegetable blend)*
- mushrooms (canned, fresh or frozen)
- okra (canned, fresh or frozen)
- onion (green, spinach, sweet, white, yellow, purple) (dehydrated, canned, fresh or frozen)
- radishes, without tops (fresh)
- sugar snap peas (frozen)
- summer squash (yellow or zucchini) (canned, fresh or frozen)
- turnips, without tops
- wax beans (canned, fresh or frozen)
- zucchini