



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. Schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs must meet the following standards. *Note: In 2022, USDA issued [transitional nutrition standards](#) for School Years (SY) 2022/23 and 2023/24 to ease some requirements due to pandemic challenges. In February 2023, USDA [proposed long-term standards](#). Once finalized, changes would begin to take effect in fall 2024.*

More fruits and vegetables: Since 2012, schools offer students larger portions of fruits and vegetables with every [lunch](#). Vegetable choices must include weekly offerings of legumes, dark green and red/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 50% whole grain). *Under [transitional standards](#), at least 80% of grains offered must be whole grain-rich.*

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 reduce sodium levels in school meals. *[Transitional nutrition standards](#) eased sodium limits for SY 2022/23 and 2023/24, establishing interim Target 1A limits until USDA finalizes long-term standards.*

National School Lunch Program Sodium Reduction Limits

	Target 1 (effective July 2014)	Target 1A (effective July 2023)
Grades K-5:	≤1,230	≤1,110
Grades 6-8:	≤1,360	≤1,225
Grades 9-12:	≤1,420	≤1,280

School Breakfast Program Sodium Reduction Limits

	Target 1 (effective July 2014)
Grades K-5:	≤540
Grades 6-8:	≤600
Grades 9-12:	≤640

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. [Transitional nutrition standards](#) allow schools to offer flavored 1% milk.

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