

Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschoolers (ages 1-4) in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. For information on the meal patterns and crediting foods for grades K-12, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages. For information on the meal patterns and crediting foods for preschoolers, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Quantities for the meat/meat alternates component are indicated as ounce equivalents in the NSLP meal pattern for grades K-12, and as ounces in the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 and the NSLP and ASP meal patterns for preschoolers. The amount that credits as 1 ounce equivalent or 1 ounce of meat/meat alternates is the same.



Nuts and seeds and their butters credit as meat alternates in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs. Creditable nuts and seeds include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, soy nuts, and sunflower seeds. Roasted or dried soybeans credit the same as soy nuts, which credit as meat alternates. However, fresh soybeans (edamame) credit as the vegetables component (legumes subgroup). For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP](#).



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Limit for Nuts and Seeds at Lunch

Nuts and seeds cannot credit for more than half of the meat/meat alternates component at lunch. They must be combined with another meat or meat alternate to meet the full requirement for each grade group. For example, the lunch meal pattern for grades 9-12 requires 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component. A lunch for this grade group cannot contain more than 1 ounce of nuts or seeds and must also include 1 ounce equivalent of another meat or meat alternate, such as ½ cup of yogurt, 1 ounce of lean meat or cheese, ¼ cup of cottage cheese, or ¼ cup of cooked legumes. This requirement does not apply to nut or seed butters.

Crediting Nut and Seed Butters

Examples of creditable nut and seed butters include almond butter, cashew nut butter, peanut butter, sesame seed butter, soy nut butter, and sunflower seed butter. Reduced-fat peanut butter must meet the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) standard of identity for peanut butter (21 CFR 164.150), which requires that products contain at least 90 percent peanuts.

The serving for nut and seed butters is based on volume (tablespoons). Two tablespoons credit as 1 ounce equivalent of the meat/meat alternates component for grades K-12 in the NSLP, and 1 ounce of the meat/meat alternates component for grades K-12 in the ASP and preschoolers in the NSLP. Table 1 shows the meat/meat alternates contribution of nut and seed butters.

Table 1. Serving size for nut and seed butters

Meal pattern serving of meat/meat alternates	Tablespoons ¹	Scoop (disher) size ²	Weight equivalent ³
¼ ounce equivalent (minimum creditable amount)	½	Closest is No. 100 (2 teaspoons)	0.275 ounces
½ ounce equivalent	1	Closest is No. 60 (¾ teaspoons)	0.55 ounces
¾ ounce equivalent	1½	Closest is No. 40 (1⅓ tablespoons)	0.825 ounces
1 ounce equivalent	2	No. 30 (2 tablespoons)	1.1 ounces
1½ ounce equivalents	3	Closest is No. 20 (3⅓ tablespoons)	1.65 ounces
2 ounce equivalents	4	No. 16 (¼ cup)	1.2 ounces

¹ One tablespoon equals 3 teaspoons.

² Scoop equivalents are from the Institute of Child Nutrition’s *Basics at a Glance Portion Control Poster*.

³ Weight equivalents are from the USDA’s *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs*.

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The required volume measure (tablespoons) for nut and seed butters is not the same as weight (ounces). For example, a 1-ounce serving of peanut butter does not provide 1 ounce equivalent of the meat/meat alternates component. Nut and seed butters that are portioned by weight instead of volume must use the appropriate weight conversion in the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG). The FBG indicates that 1.1 ounces of nut or seed butters credit as 1 ounce equivalent (2 tablespoons) of the meat/meat alternates component. Table 1 indicates the meat/meat alternates contribution of nut and seed butters.

Serving Size Considerations

Menu planners should consider the appropriateness of the required serving for each grade group. It may be unreasonable to provide the full serving of a nut or seed butter in one menu item, such as a peanut butter sandwich. For example, the lunch meal pattern for grades 9-12 requires 4 tablespoons ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) of peanut butter to credit as 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component. This is a large amount for two slices of bread.



The CSDE recommends providing a smaller portion of peanut butter and supplementing with another meat or meat alternate to provide the full serving. For example, a lunch menu could provide 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component from a sandwich containing 2 tablespoons of peanut butter (1 ounce equivalent of meat alternate) served with 1 ounce equivalent of another meat or meat alternate, such as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of yogurt. Another option is providing the required 4 tablespoons of peanut butter in three half-sandwiches that each contain 4 teaspoons of peanut butter.

Nut, Seed, and Nut/Seed Butter Ingredients in Commercial Products

Nuts and seeds and their butters that are ingredients in commercial products must be visible and easily recognizable as meat substitutes to credit toward the school meal patterns. Commercial products that are not easily recognizable as meat substitutes cannot credit as the meat/meat alternates component. Some examples include peanut butter blended into other foods (such as muffins or smoothies), peanut butter granola bars, and chopped nuts in muffins.

The USDA's intent for this requirement is to ensure that SFAs offer foods from the meat/meat alternates component in a form that is recognizable to children. The USDA emphasizes the importance of the nutrition education aspect of the school nutrition programs, which includes the goal of helping children easily recognize the key food groups that contribute to a healthy meal.

Noncreditable Nuts and Seeds

Acorns, chestnuts, and coconuts do not credit as the meat/meat alternates component.

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Crediting in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

The requirements and considerations for crediting nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters in meals and snacks for grades K-12 are summarized below.

- **Breakfast:** The [SBP meal pattern for grades K-12](#) does not require the meat/meat alternates component. School food authorities (SFAs) may offer the meat/meat alternates component (including nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters) as a grain substitute, after offering the minimum daily 1 ounce equivalent of grains. A 1-ounce serving of nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters offered as a grain substitute credits as 1 ounce equivalent of the grains component.
- **Lunch:** The [lunch meal pattern for grades K-12](#) requires that nuts and seeds cannot credit for more than half of the meat/meat alternates component. This requirement does not apply to nut/seed butters. Menu planners must combine nuts and seeds with another meat or meat alternate to meet the full requirement for each grade group. For example, the lunch meal pattern for grades 9-12 requires 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component. A lunch for this grade group cannot contain more than 1 ounce equivalent of nuts or seeds and must also include 1 ounce equivalent of another meat or meat alternate, such as ½ cup of yogurt, 1 ounce of lean meat or cheese, ¼ cup of cottage cheese, or ¼ cup of cooked legumes.
- **ASP snack:** The [ASP meal pattern for grades K-12](#) requires any two of the four snack components (meat/meat alternates, grains, vegetables/fruits, and milk). SFAs may serve, nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters as one of the two required snack components. Nuts and seeds may credit as the full required 1-ounce serving of the meat/meat alternates component at snack.

Crediting in the Meal Patterns for Preschoolers

The requirements and considerations for crediting nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters in meals and snacks for preschoolers (ages 1-4) are summarized below.

- **Breakfast:** The [SBP meal pattern for preschoolers](#) does not require the meat/meat alternates component. SFAs may substitute foods from the meat/meat alternates component (including nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters) for the entire grains component up to three times per week. A ½-ounce serving of nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters offered as a grain substitute credits as ½ ounce equivalent of the grains component (the minimum serving for ages 1-4). For more information, visit the USDA's webpage, [Serving Meat and Meat Alternates at Breakfast](#).
- **Lunch:** Nuts and seeds cannot credit for more than half of the meat/meat alternates component in the [NSLP preschool lunch meal pattern](#). This requirement does not apply to nut/seed butters. SFAs must combine nuts and seeds with another food from the meat/meat alternates component to meet the full requirement for each age group. For

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example, the lunch meal pattern for ages 3-4 requires 1½ ounces of the meat/meat alternates component. A lunch for this age group cannot contain more than ¾ ounce of nuts or seeds and must also include ¾ ounce equivalent of another food from the meat/meat alternates component.

- **ASP snack:** The [ASP preschool meal pattern](#) requires any two of the five snack components (meat/meat alternates, grains, vegetables, fruits, and milk). SFAs may serve nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters as one of the two required snack components. Nuts and seeds may credit as the full serving (½ ounce equivalent) of the meat/meat alternates component for ages 1-4.

Considerations for reducing choking risks for young children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Nuts, seeds, chunky peanut butter, and chunks or spoonfuls of nut or seed butters are choking hazards.

Consider children’s age and developmental readiness when deciding how to offer nuts, seeds, and their butters in school menus, and modify foods and menus as appropriate. Preparation techniques to reduce the risk of choking include grinding or finely chopping peanuts, nuts, and seeds before adding to prepared foods, and using only creamy nut or seed butters and spreading them thinly on other foods such as toast and crackers. For additional guidance, visit the “[Choking Prevention](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Required Crediting Documentation for Commercial Products

Commercial processed products that contain nuts and seeds or their butters (such as pre-made peanut butter sandwiches or a trail mix with nuts and dried fruit) require documentation stating the amount of the meat/meat alternates component per serving. Acceptable documentation includes 1) an original Child Nutrition (CN) label from the product carton, or a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton; or 2) a product formulation statement (PFS) signed by an official of the manufacturer stating the amount of the meat/meat alternates component contained in one serving of the product.

For example, to credit a commercial pre-made peanut butter sandwich as 1 ounce equivalent of the meat/meat alternates component, the product’s CN label or PFS must state that one serving contains 2 tablespoons of peanut butter.

Commercial processed products without a CN label or PFS cannot credit in the meal patterns for school nutrition programs.

SFAs must obtain a PFS for all commercial processed products that are not CN labeled. Crediting documentation must be maintained on file. The CSDE will review this information during the Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs.

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For more information on PFS forms, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the NSLP and SBP*. For guidance on how to review a PFS, refer to the USDA's *Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement* and *Reviewer's Checklist for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements for Meat/Meat Alternates*. Additional guidance on documentation for commercial products is available in the "Crediting Commercial Processed Products for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs" and "Crediting Commercial Processed Products in Preschool Menus" sections of the CSDE's school nutrition programs webpages.

Training on the requirements for PFS forms and how to evaluate a PFS is available in Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*.

Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Accepting_Proccsed_Product_Documentation_SNP.pdf

Afterschool Snack Program Handbook (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/ASP/ASP_Handbook.pdf

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CN_Labeling_Program.pdf

Choking Prevention (CSDE's Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Food-Safety-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#ChokingPrevention>

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Commercial_MMA_SNP.pdf

Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Standard of Identity for Peanut Butter (21 CFR 164.150):

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-164/subpart-B/section-164.150>

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents>

Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-Preschoolers-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

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Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#MMA>

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12 in the ASP (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Afterschool-Snack-Program/Documents#MMAK12>

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Preschoolers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-Preschoolers-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Related-Resources#MMA>

Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Menu_Planning_Guide_Preschool.pdf

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

Product Formulation Statement (Product Analysis) for Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA) Products in Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Meats-Meat_Alternates_Fillable_508.pdf

Resources for the Preschool Meal Patterns (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Resources_Preschool_Meal_Patterns.pdf

Reviewer's Checklist for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements for Meat/Meat Alternates (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/reviewer_checklist.pdf

Serving Meat and Meat Alternates at Breakfast – Handouts, training slides, and webinars in English and Spanish (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/serving-meats-and-meat-alternates-breakfast>

Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/manufacturerPFStipsheet.pdf>

Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Product_Formulation_Statements.pdf

What's in a Meal Module 8: Meat/Meat Alternates Component (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Pattern-Training-Materials>

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For more information, refer to the CSDE's guides, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and *Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP*, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Nuts_Seeds_SNP.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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