

National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern for Preschoolers

Through September 30, 2021

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern for preschoolers is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) final rule, *Child and Adult Care Food Program: Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010*. For information on meeting the preschool meal pattern and crediting requirements, review the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) guide, *Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)*, and handout, *Resources for the Preschool Meal Patterns*; and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Food Components ¹	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-4
Milk, fluid ² Age 1: Unflavored whole milk Ages 2-4: Unflavored low-fat (1%) milk or unflavored fat-free milk	4 fluid ounces ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup)	6 fluid ounces ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
Meat/meat alternates ³ Lean meat, poultry, or fish	1 ounce	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces
Surimi ⁴	3 ounces	4.4 ounces
Tofu, soy products, tempeh, or alternate protein products (APPs) ⁵	1 ounce	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces
Cheese	1 ounce	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces
Cottage cheese	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	$\frac{3}{8}$ cup
Egg, large	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{3}{4}$
Cooked dry beans or peas ⁶	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	$\frac{3}{8}$ cup
Peanut butter, soy nut butter, or other nut or seed butters	2 tablespoons	3 tablespoons
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds ⁷	$\frac{1}{2}$ ounce = 50%	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce = 50%
Yogurt or soy yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened ⁸	4 ounces or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	6 ounces or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
Vegetables ^{9, 10}	$\frac{1}{8}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup
Fruits ^{10, 11, 12}	$\frac{1}{8}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup
Grains ^{13, 14, 15} WGR or enriched bread	$\frac{1}{2}$ slice ¹⁶	$\frac{1}{2}$ slice ¹⁶
WGR or enriched bread product, e.g., biscuit, roll, or muffin	$\frac{1}{2}$ serving ¹⁶	$\frac{1}{2}$ serving ¹⁶
WGR, enriched, or fortified cooked breakfast cereal ¹⁷ , cereal grain ¹⁸ , or pasta	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup
WGR, enriched, or fortified ready-to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereal (dry, cold) ^{17, 19}	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup or $\frac{1}{3}$ ounce	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup or $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce
◀ See page 2 for important menu planning notes ▶		

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Menu planning notes for lunch

- ¹ Lunch must include the minimum serving of all five components. Use the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) to determine the amount of purchased food that meets the requirements. For processed foods, review the product's Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS). For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, *Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program*, *Product Formulation Statements*, *Accepting Processed Product Documentation*, and *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP*; and visit the "Crediting Commercial Processed Products" section of the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage. Foods made on site must have a standardized recipe that documents crediting information. For more information, visit the "Crediting Foods Prepared on Site" section of the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage.
- ² Flavored milk cannot be served. For more information, visit the "Milk Component for Preschoolers" section of the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage.
- ³ A serving is the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, fillers, or other ingredients. For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP*. The USDA's *CACFP Best Practices* recommends serving only lean meats, nuts, and legumes; limiting processed meats to one serving per week; and serving only low-fat or reduced-fat natural cheese. For more information, visit the "Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Preschoolers" section of the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage.
- ⁴ Surimi seafood is a pasteurized, ready-to-eat, restructured seafood product usually made from pollock (fish). A CN label or manufacturer's PFS is required to credit surimi seafood differently from these amounts.
- ⁵ APPs must meet the requirements in [appendix A](#) of the NSLP regulations (7 CFR 210). Tofu must contain at least 5 grams of protein in 2.2 ounces (weight) or ¼ cup (volume). For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP*. A 1-ounce serving of tempeh credits as 1 ounce of the meat/meat alternates component if the product's ingredients include only soybeans (or other legumes), water, tempeh culture, and for some varieties, vinegar, seasonings, and herbs. If a tempeh product contains other ingredients, a CN label or PFS is required to document crediting information.
- ⁶ Legumes (cooked dry beans and peas) credit as either the meat/meat alternates component or the vegetables component, but not both in the same meal. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Crediting Legumes in the NSLP and SBP*.
- ⁷ Creditable nuts and seeds include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios, and soy nuts. Nuts and seeds cannot credit for more than half of the meat/meat alternates component. They must be combined with another meat/meat alternate to meet the total requirement. **Note:** Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. The USDA recommends that any nuts or seeds served to young children are in a prepared food and are ground or finely chopped. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the NSLP and SBP*.
- ⁸ Yogurt and soy yogurt cannot contain more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces (no more than 3.83 grams per ounce). For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Crediting Yogurt for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP*.
- ⁹ The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables. Dried vegetables require a PFS. A serving of cooked vegetables must be drained. Vegetables credit based on volume, except raw leafy greens such as lettuce and spinach credit as half the volume served (e.g., 1 cup credits as ½ cup of vegetables), and tomato paste and puree credit based on the volume as if reconstituted (see the FBG). The USDA's *CACFP Best Practices* recommends that preschool menus include at least one serving per week of each vegetable subgroup (dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other). For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Vegetable Subgroups in the CACFP*, and visit the "Vegetables Component for Preschoolers" section of the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage.

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Menu planning notes for lunch, *continued*

- ¹⁰ Pasteurized full-strength juice credits as the vegetables or fruits component at only one preschool meal or snack per day. Juice includes all fruit and vegetable juice, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies, and juice from canned fruit in 100 percent juice. For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, [Crediting Juice for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#) and [Crediting Smoothies for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#). The USDA's *CACFP Best Practices* recommends serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice.
- ¹¹ Vegetables can substitute for the entire fruits component at lunch. If lunch includes two servings vegetables, they must be different kinds.
- ¹² The fruits component includes fresh fruit, frozen fruit, dried fruit, and canned fruit. Serve canned fruit in juice, water, or light syrup. A serving of canned fruit may include the 100 percent juice in which the fruit is packed, but cannot include water or syrup. Dried fruit credits as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component. The USDA's *CACFP Best Practices* recommends serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice. For more information, visit the "[Fruits Component for Preschoolers](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹³ To credit as the grains component, a creditable grain (whole, enriched, bran, or germ) must be the first ingredient (excluding water), or the greatest ingredient by weight. For information on identifying creditable grains, see the CSDE's handouts, [How to Identify Creditable Grains for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#), [Crediting Whole Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#), and [Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#); and visit the "[Grains Component for Preschoolers](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹⁴ At least one serving per day must be WGR. The USDA's *CACFP Best Practices* recommends at least two servings of WGR grains per day. For the preschool meal patterns only, WGR foods contain at least 50 percent whole grains and the remaining grain ingredients are enriched, bran, or germ. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Whole Grain-rich Criteria for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#), [Crediting Whole Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#) and [Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#); and visit the "[Whole Grain-rich Requirement](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹⁵ Except for sweet crackers (such as graham crackers and animal crackers), grain-based desserts cannot credit. Examples include cookies, piecrusts in sweet pies, doughnuts, cereal bars, granola bars, sweet rolls, pastries, toaster pastries, cake, and brownies. The CSDE recommends not serving sweet crackers more than twice per week between all preschool meals and snacks. For more information, visit the USDA's webpage, [Grain-Based Desserts in the CACFP](#).
- ¹⁶ Through September 30, 2021, grains must meet the required weights or volumes in [Grain Servings for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#), or provide the minimum creditable grains per serving. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Calculation Methods for Grain Servings for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#). Effective October 1, 2021, the required amounts for the grains component change to ounce equivalents. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#), and visit the "[Serving Size for Grains](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹⁷ Breakfast cereals cannot contain more than 6 grams of sugars per dry ounce (no more than 21.2 grams of sucrose and other sugars per 100 grams of dry cereal). For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#).
- ¹⁸ Examples of cereal grains include amaranth, barley, buckwheat, cornmeal, corn grits, kasha, millet, oats, quinoa, wheat berries, and rolled wheat.
- ¹⁹ Effective October 1, 2021, the required amount for RTE breakfast cereals changes to ounce equivalents. The required volume for ages 1-4 (½ ounce equivalent) is ½ cup of flaked or round cereal, ¾ cup of puffed cereal, and ⅓ cup of granola.

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For more information, review the CSDE's *Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP* and visit the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs* webpage, or contact the *school nutrition programs staff* in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/LunchMealPatternPreschool.pdf>.

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