

# National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

## Four-day Lunch Meal Pattern for Grades 6-8

**School Year 2023-24 (July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024)**

Food Components <sup>1</sup>	Grades 6-8	
	Daily	Weekly <sup>2</sup>
<b>Milk, fluid, cups</b> <sup>3</sup> Low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, unflavored or flavored	1	4
<b>Fruits, cups</b> <sup>4</sup> Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly fruits	1/2	2
<b>Vegetables, cups</b> <sup>5</sup> Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetables	3/4	3
Dark green <sup>6</sup>	0	1/2
Red/orange <sup>7</sup>	0	3/4
Beans/peas (legumes) <sup>8</sup>	0	1/2
Starchy <sup>9</sup>	0	1/2
Other <sup>10</sup>	0	1/2
Additional vegetables to reach total <sup>11</sup>	0	1/4
<b>Grains, ounce equivalents (oz eq)</b> <sup>12</sup> Must be whole grain-rich (≥ 80 percent) or enriched (≤ 20 percent)	1	6 1/2-8
<b>Meats/meat alternates (MMA), oz eq</b> <sup>13</sup>	1	7-8
<b>Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards):</b> Daily amount based on the average for a four-day week		
Calories <sup>14, 15</sup>	600-700	
Saturated fat (percentage of total calories) <sup>15</sup>	< 10	
Sodium (milligrams) <sup>15, 16</sup>	≤ 1,225	
Trans fat (grams) <sup>15</sup>	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving	

◀ Refer to page 2 for important menu planning notes ▶

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## Menu planning notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lunches must include the minimum serving of all five components and may include larger amounts if the weekly menu meets the dietary specifications. Use the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) to determine how foods credit and the amount that provides the required meal pattern serving. Processed foods not listed in the FBG require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. For information on crediting documentation, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, *Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program, Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs, Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the NSLP and SBP*, and *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP*, and visit the "Crediting Commercial Processed Products" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage. Foods made from scratch must have a standardized recipe that documents crediting information. For more information, visit the "Crediting Foods Made from Scratch" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage. The CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*, provides comprehensive guidance on meeting the NSLP meal pattern and crediting requirements.
- <sup>2</sup> A week equals four days. This meal pattern is only for schools that regularly operate on a four-day week.
- <sup>3</sup> Allowable types of milk include low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk, either unflavored or flavored. At least two different varieties must be offered and at least one milk choice must be unflavored. For more information, visit the "Milk Component for Grades K-12" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- <sup>4</sup> The fruits component includes fresh, frozen, and dried fruits, canned fruit in juice, water, or light syrup, and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength fruit juice. Fruits credit based on volume (cups), except dried fruits such as raisins credit as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup credits as ½ cup of the fruits component. Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings. For example, if the weekly lunch menu for grades 6-8 offers 2 cups of the fruits component, juice cannot exceed 1 cup. The juice limit includes 100 percent juice, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits in smoothies. The juice from canned fruit counts toward the juice limit if the menu planner credits the juice toward the fruits component. For the best nutrition, serve whole fruits instead of juice. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP*, and visit the "Fruits Component for Grades K-12" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- <sup>5</sup> The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength vegetable juice. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens such as lettuce and spinach credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup credits as ½ cup of the vegetables component. A serving of canned vegetables must be drained. Dried vegetables (such as potato flakes and dried soup mix) credit based on their rehydrated volume and require a PFS. Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings. Pureed vegetables in smoothies credit only as juice. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP* and visit the "Vegetables Component for Grades K-12" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- <sup>6</sup> Examples of the dark green subgroup include arugula, bok choy, broccoli, collard greens, dark green leafy lettuce, kale, mesclun, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, spinach, turnip greens, and watercress.
- <sup>7</sup> Examples of the red/orange subgroup include acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, orange peppers, pumpkin, red peppers, spaghetti squash, tomatoes, tomato juice, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.
- <sup>8</sup> Examples of the beans and peas (legumes) subgroup include black beans, black-eyed peas (mature, dry), garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, refried beans, soybeans, split peas, and white beans. Note: Green peas, green lima beans, and green (string) beans are not legumes and are not in this subgroup.
- <sup>9</sup> Examples of the starchy subgroup include black-eyed peas (not dry), corn, cassava, green bananas, green peas, green lima beans, parsnips, plantains, taro, water chestnuts, and white potatoes.
- <sup>10</sup> The "other" subgroup includes all other vegetables such as artichokes, asparagus, avocado, beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, green peppers, iceberg lettuce, mushrooms, okra, onions, turnips, wax

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## Menu planning notes, *continued*

beans, and zucchini. The “other” vegetables requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) subgroups, but not the starchy subgroup.

- <sup>11</sup> Any vegetable subgroup may be offered as additional vegetables to meet the total weekly vegetable requirements.
- <sup>12</sup> At least 80 percent of the grains offered at lunch must be WGR (refer to the CSDE’s *Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the NSLP and SBP*). Grains that are not WGR must be enriched (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP*). Foods in groups A-H of the USDA’s Exhibit A chart are WGR if: 1) they are 100 percent whole grain or contain a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains are less than ¼ oz eq per portion, i.e., ≤ 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G or ≤ 6.99 grams per portion for group H (refer to the CSDE’s *Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*). Ready-to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereals in group I must be WGR, enriched, or fortified and cannot exceed 6.99 grams of noncreditable grains per portion (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP*). RTE breakfast cereals are WGR if: 1) the first ingredient is a whole grain and the cereal is fortified, or the cereal is 100 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. Fortification is not required for 100 whole-grain RTE cereals. The required weekly oz eq are ranges. Menus must provide the minimum. The maximum is not required but provides a guide for planning age-appropriate meals that meet the dietary specifications. Grain products and recipes must provide the required serving weight (groups A-E) or volume (groups H-I) in the USDA’s Exhibit A chart (refer to the CSDE’s *Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *How to Use the Ounce Equivalents Chart for the NSLP and SBP*) or provide the minimum creditable grains (refer to the CSDE’s *Calculation Methods for Crediting Grains for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs*). For more information, visit the “Grains Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- <sup>13</sup> The MMA component must be served in a main dish or a main dish and one other food item. The required weekly oz eq are ranges. Menus must provide the minimum. The maximum is not required but provides a guide for planning age-appropriate meals that meet the dietary specifications. The serving size refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. A 1-oz eq serving equals 1 ounce of lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1 ounce of cheese (low-fat recommended); 2 ounces of cottage or ricotta cheese (low-fat recommended); ¼ cup of legumes, i.e., cooked beans and peas (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Legumes in the NSLP and SBP*); ½ large egg; 2 tablespoons of nut or seed butters (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the NSLP and SBP*); 1 ounce of nuts or seeds, e.g., almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and soy nuts; ¼ cup (2.2 ounces) of commercial tofu containing at least 5 grams of protein (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP*); 1 ounce of tempeh; 3 ounces of surimi; ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Yogurt for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP*); and 1 ounce of alternate protein products (APPs) that meet the USDA’s requirements in appendix A of the NSLP regulations 7 CFR 210 (refer to the CSDE’s *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the NSLP and SBP*). Nuts and seeds cannot credit for more than half of the MMA component at lunch. Commercial processed products that contain added ingredients (such as combination foods, deli meats, hot dogs, and sausages) require a CN label or PFS to document crediting information (refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP*). For more information, visit the “Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- <sup>14</sup> The lunch menu’s average daily calories for a four-day school week must be at least the minimum value but cannot exceed the maximum value. Meals may include discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) if the weekly menu meets the dietary specifications. For more information, refer to section 6 of the CSDE’s *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and visit the “Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards for School Meals)” section of the CSDE’s *Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs* webpage.
- <sup>15</sup> The lunch menu’s average daily sodium (milligrams) for a four-day school week must meet this sodium target through June 30, 2024 (refer to the CSDE’s *Transitional Sodium Limits for the NSLP and SBP*).

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For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages 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/MealPattern/NSLP\\_meal\\_pattern\\_4day\\_grades\\_6-8.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/NSLP_meal_pattern_4day_grades_6-8.pdf).

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