

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

School Year 2025-26 (July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026)

Meal components ¹	Grades 6-8 Daily	Grades 6-8 Weekly
Milk, fluid, cups ² Low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, unflavored or flavored	1	5
Fruits, cups ³ Fruit juice: ≤ half of weekly fruits ⁴	$\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$
Vegetables, cups ⁵ Vegetable juice: ≤ half of weekly vegetables ⁴	$\frac{3}{4}$	$3\frac{3}{4}$
Dark green ⁶	0	$\frac{1}{2}$
Red/orange ⁷	0	$\frac{3}{4}$
Beans, peas, and lentils ⁸	0	$\frac{1}{2}$
Starchy ⁹	0	$\frac{1}{2}$
Other ¹⁰	0	$\frac{1}{2}$
Additional vegetables to reach total ¹¹	0	1
Grains, ounce equivalents (oz eq) ¹² Must be whole grain-rich (WGR) (≥ 80 percent per week) or enriched (≤ 20 percent per week) ¹³	1	8-10
Meats/meat alternates (MMA), oz eq ¹⁴	1	9-10

Dietary specifications (nutrition standards): Daily amount based on the average for a five-day week

Nutrition standards	Grades 6-8
Calories ¹⁵	600-700
Saturated fat (percentage of total calories)	< 10
Sodium (milligrams): Target 1A through June 30, 2027	≤ 1,225

NSLP Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

Menu Planning Notes

- ¹ Lunches must include the minimum daily and weekly servings of the five meal components and may include larger amounts if the weekly menu meets the weekly 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. Commercial processed foods not listed in the FBG require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. School food authorities must verify PFS forms for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the product in reimbursable meals and snacks. Foods made from scratch must have a standardized recipe that documents the crediting information per serving. For information on crediting documentation, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, [Using Child Nutrition \(CN\) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs](#), [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and visit the CSDE's [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. The CSDE's [What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#) training program provides comprehensive guidance on meeting the NSLP meal pattern and crediting requirements.
- ² Allowable types of milk include low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk, either unflavored or flavored. At least two different varieties must be offered including at least one unflavored milk choice. For more information, visit the "[Milk](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ³ 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 credit as twice the volume served, e.g., $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of raisins credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component. For more information, visit the "[Fruits](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ⁴ Fruit and vegetable juices must be pasteurized 100 percent juices. Fruit juices cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings. Vegetable juices cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings. The juice limit includes all fruit and vegetable juices, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Crediting Juices in the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

NSLP Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

- ⁵ The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent vegetable juice. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup of lettuce or spinach credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ 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. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program](#), and visit the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ⁶ 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.
- ⁷ 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.
- ⁸ Examples of the beans, peas, and lentils 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 in this subgroup. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- ⁹ 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.
- ¹⁰ 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 beans, and zucchini. The "other" vegetables requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green subgroup, red/orange subgroup, and beans, peas, and lentils subgroup, but not the starchy subgroup.
- ¹¹ Any vegetable subgroup may be offered as additional vegetables to meet the total weekly vegetable requirements.

NSLP Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

- ¹² The weekly grains oz eq must be at least the minimum oz eq but may exceed the maximum oz eq. The maximum oz eq provide a guide for meeting the weekly dietary specifications. Grain products and standardized 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 Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#)) or provide the minimum creditable grains (refer to the CSDE's [Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Meal Patterns for School Nutrition Programs](#) and [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#)). For more information, visit the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹³ At least 80 percent of the weekly offered grains oz eq must be WGR (refer to the CSDE's [Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) and CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#)). Grains that are not WGR must be enriched and cannot exceed 20 percent of the weekly offered grains oz eq (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#)). Foods in groups A-G (baked goods) and group H (cereal grains like rice, pasta, and quinoa) must meet two WGR criteria: 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 do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. Cooked breakfast cereals (group H) and RTE breakfast cereals (group I) must meet three WGR criteria: 1) the first ingredient is a whole grain and the cereal is fortified, or the cereal is 100 percent whole grain; 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion; and 3) added sugars do not exceed 6 grams of per dry ounce (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#)). Breakfast cereals that are not WGR must be enriched or fortified and cannot exceed 6.99 grams of noncreditable grains per portion. Fortification is not required for 100 whole-grain cereals.

NSLP Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

- ¹⁴ MMA must be served in a main dish or a main dish and one other food item. The weekly MMA oz eq must be at least the minimum oz eq but may exceed the maximum oz eq. The maximum oz eq provide a guide for meeting the weekly 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. One oz eq 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 beans, pea, or lentils (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs](#)); ½ large egg; 2 tablespoons of nut or seed butters (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs](#)); 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 School Nutrition Programs](#)); 1 ounce of tempeh; 3 ounces of surimi; ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt that contains no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces, i.e., no more than 2 grams of added sugars per ounce (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Yogurt in the School Nutrition Programs](#)); and 1 ounce of alternate protein products (APPs) that meet the USDA requirements in [appendix A of 7 CFR 210](#) (refer to the CSDE's [Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#)). Commercial processed MMA products (such as combination entrees like pizza and chicken nuggets, 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 School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs](#)). For more information, visit the “[Meats and Meat Alternates](#)” section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- ¹⁵ The weekly lunch menu's average daily calories must be at least the minimum but cannot exceed the maximum. For more information on the dietary specifications, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) and visit the “[Dietary Specifications](#)” section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

NSLP Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

For more information on the NSLP meal patterns, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage, [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage, and [Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12](#) webpage 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_5day_grades_6-8.pdf.

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