

The School Lunch Pattern for Various Age/Grade Groups

The United States Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program requires that portions of meal components be adjusted by age/grade group to better meet the food and nutritional needs of children according to their ages.

Quantities Required to Offer							
Food Components	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-4	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12	Specific Requirements	
Meat or Meat Alternate (M/MA)			8 oz. eq./wk	9 oz. eq./wk	10 oz. eq./wk	Must be served in the main dish or as the main dish and only one other menu item. Vegetable protein products, cheese, alternate cheese products, and enriched macaroni with fortified protein may be used to meet part of the meat/meat alternate requirement. Food and Nutrition Service Fact Sheets on each of these alternate foods give detailed instructions for use. Nuts and seeds may be used to satisfy 100% of the meat/meat alternate requirement. <u>Sugar limits to be implemented by 2025/2026:</u> Yogurt may have no more than 12 grams of added sugar per 8 fluid ounces.	
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			9 oz. eq.*/wk				
Lean meat, poultry, fish	1 oz.	1 ½ oz.	1 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum	1 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum	2 oz. eq. ^x per day minimum		
Cheese	1 oz.	1 ½ oz.					
Large egg(s)	½	¾					
Cooked, dry beans or peas	¼ cup	3/8 cup					
Peanut butter (or any nut or seed butter)	2 Tbsp	3 Tbsp					
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts or seeds	½ oz.	¾ oz.					
Yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened	4 oz. or ½ cup	6 oz. or ¾ cup					
Grains						8 oz. eq/wk	8 oz. eq/wk
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			8 oz. eq*/wk				
Servings of grains or breads must be whole-grain rich	5 per week at least ½ svg/ day	8 per week at least 1 svg/day	1 oz. eq. per day minimum	1 oz. eq. per day minimum	2 oz. eq. per day minimum		
Vegetable			¾ cup every day		1 cup every day	No more than ½ of the total requirement may be met with full-strength vegetable juice. In grades K-12 the vegetable subgroups need to be offered throughout the week. The amounts listed here are the minimum amount that must be offered during the week. Beans, peas, and lentils offered towards the meat/meat alternate component can also count toward the weekly vegetable subgroup requirement.	
Dark Green	1/2 cup either or	1/2 cup either or	½ cup every week		½ cup every week		
Red/Orange			¾ cup every week		1 ¼ cups every week		
Beans/Peas/Lentils			½ cup every week		½ cup every week		
Starchy			½ cup every week		½ cup every week		
Other			½ cup every week		¾ cup every week		
Fruit			½ cup every day	½ cup every day	1 cup every day	No more than ½ of the total weekly requirement may be met with 100% full-strength fruit juice.	
Milk (fluid offered as a beverage)			¾ cup (6 fl. oz)		½ pint (8 fl. oz)	Milk may be 1% or fat free. Flavored or unflavored milk may be offered. <u>Sugar limits to be implemented by school year 2025/2026:</u> Flavored milk must contain no more than 10 grams of added sugar per 8 fluid ounces.	
Min. and Max. Calorie Ranges in an average 5-day week menu			517*	550-650	600-700	750-850	Menus for students ages 1-2 and ages 3-4 have a minimum calorie requirement of 517 calories averaged over the school week.
When combining K-5 & 6-8 to establish a K-8 group.			600-650				
Sodium			≤ 1110	≤ 1225	≤ 1280	K-8 group sodium max = 1110 mg.	

^Schools serving lunch 7 days per week should increase the weekly quantity by approximately 20% for each additional day. Food Buying Guide FNS Instruction 783-1, Rev. 2 Grains and Bread Instruction provides the information for the minimum weight of serving.