



MENU PLANNING IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

The National School Lunch Act mandates that school meals "safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children". Participating schools must serve lunches that are consistent with the applicable recommendations of the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans including: eat a variety of foods; choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables and fruits; choose a diet moderate in sugars and salt; and choose a diet with 30% or less of calories from fat and less than 10% of calories from saturated fat. In addition, lunches must provide, on average over each school week, at least 1/3 of the daily Recommended Dietary Allowances for protein, iron, calcium, and vitamins A and C. To provide local food service professionals with flexibility, there are four menu planning approaches to plan healthful and appealing meals. Schools choose one of the approaches below. Local schools make the choice of what specific foods are served and how they are prepared and presented.

(See charts on following pages.)

The Traditional Food-Based Menu Planning Approach

Under the Traditional Food-Based Menu Planning Approach, schools must comply with specific component and quantity requirements by offering five food items from four food components. These components are: meat/meat alternate, vegetables and/or fruits, grains/breads, and milk. Minimum portion sizes are established by ages and grade groups.

TRADITIONAL FOOD-BASED MENU PLANNING APPROACH—MEAL PATTERN FOR LUNCHES					
FOOD COMPONENTS AND FOOD ITEMS	MINIMUM QUANTITIES				RECOMMENDED QUANTITIES
	GROUP I AGES 1-2 PRESCHOOL	GROUP II AGES 3-4 PRESCHOOL	GROUP III, AGES 5-8 GRADES K-3	GROUP IV AGES 9 and older GRADES 4-12	GROUP V AGES 12 and older GRADES 7-12
Milk (as a beverage)	6 fluid ounces	6 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces
Meat or Meat Alternate (quantity of the edible portion as served):					
Lean meat, poultry, or fish	1 ounce	1½ ounces	1½ ounces	2 ounces	3 ounces
Alternate Protein Products ¹	1 ounce	1½ ounces	1½ ounces	2 ounces	3 ounces
Cheese	1 ounce	1½ ounces	1½ ounces	2 ounces	3 ounces
Large egg	½	¾	¾	1	1½
Cooked dry beans or peas	¼ cup	3/8 cup	3/8 cup	½ cup	¾ cup
Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters	2 tablespoons	3 tablespoons	3 tablespoons	4 tablespoons	6 tablespoons
Yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened	4 ounces or ½ cup	6 ounces or ¾ cup	6 ounces or ¾ cup	8 ounces or 1 cup	12 ounces or 1½ cups
The following may be used to meet no more than 50% of the requirement and must be used in combination with any of the above: Peanuts, soynuts, tree nuts, or seeds, as listed in program guidance, or an equivalent quantity of any combination of the above meat/meat alternate (1 ounce of nuts/seeds=1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish)	½ ounce =50%	¾ ounce =50%	¾ ounce =50%	1 ounce =50%	1½ ounces =50%
Vegetable or Fruit: 2 or more servings of vegetables, fruits or both	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup
Grains/Breads: (servings per week): Must be enriched or whole grain. A serving is a slice of bread or an equivalent serving of biscuits, rolls, etc., or ½ cup of cooked rice, macaroni, noodles, other pasta products or cereal grains	5 servings per week ² -- minimum of ½ serving per day	8 servings per week ² -- minimum of 1 serving per day	8 servings per week ² -- minimum of 1 serving per day	8 servings per week ² -- minimum of 1 serving per day	10 servings per week ² -- minimum of 1 serving per day

¹ Must meet the requirements in appendix A of 7 CFR 210.

² For the purposes of this table, a week equals five days.

The Traditional Food-Based Menu Planning Approach is designed to meet nutritional standards set forth in program regulations.

The Enhanced Food-Based Menu Planning Approach

The Enhanced Food-Based Menu Planning Approach is a variation of the Traditional Menu Planning Approach. It is designed to increase calories from low-fat food sources in order to meet the Dietary Guidelines. The five food components are retained, but the component quantities for the weekly servings of vegetables and fruits and grains/breads are increased.

ENHANCED FOOD-BASED MENU PLANNING APPROACH-MEAL PATTERN FOR LUNCHES					
FOOD COMPONENTS AND FOOD ITEMS	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS				OPTION FOR
	AGES 1-2	PRESCHOOL	GRADES K-6	GRADES 7-12	GRADES K-3
Milk (as a beverage)	6 fluid ounces	6 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces
Meat or Meat Alternate (quantity of the edible portion as served):					
Lean meat, poultry, or fish	1 ounce	1½ ounces	2 ounces	2 ounces	1½ ounces
Alternate protein products ¹	1 ounce	1½ ounces	2 ounces	2 ounces	1½ ounces
Cheese	1 ounce	1½ ounces	2 ounces	2 ounces	1½ ounces
Large egg	½	¾	1	1	¾
Cooked dry beans or peas	¼ cup	3/8 cup	½ cup	½ cup	3/8 cup
Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters	2 tablespoons	3 tablespoons	4 tablespoons	4 tablespoons	3 tablespoons
Yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened	4 ounces or ½ cup	6 ounces or ¾ cup	8 ounces or 1 cup	8 ounces or 1 cup	6 ounces or ¾ cup
The following may be used to meet no more than 50% of the requirement and must be used in combination with any of the above: Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds, as listed in program guidance, or an equivalent quantity of any combination of the above meat/meat alternate (1 ounce of nuts/seeds equals 1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry or fish).	½ ounce =50%	¾ ounce =50%	1 ounce =50%	1 ounce =50%	¾ ounce =50%
Vegetable or Fruit: 2 or more servings of vegetables, fruits or both	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup plus an extra ½ cup over a week ²	1 cup	¾ cup
Grains/Breads (servings per week): Must be enriched or whole grain. A serving is a slice of bread or an equivalent serving of biscuits, rolls, etc., or ½ cup of cooked rice, macaroni, noodles, other pasta products or cereal grains	5 servings per week ² – minimum of ½ serving per day	8 servings per week ² – minimum of 1 serving per day	12 servings per week ² – minimum of 1 serving per day ³	15 servings per week ² – minimum of 1 serving per day ³	10 servings per week ² – minimum of 1 serving per day ³

¹ Must meet the requirements in appendix A of 7 CFR 210.

² For the purposes of this table, a week equals five days

³ Up to one grains/breads serving per day may be a dessert.

The Enhanced Food Based Menu Planning Approach is designed to meet the nutritional standards set forth in program regulations.

The Nutrient Standard Menu Planning Approach

Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (sometimes called “NuMenus”) is a computer-based menu planning system that uses approved computer software to analyze the specific nutrient content of menu items automatically while menus are being planned. It is designed to assist menu planners in choosing food items that create nutritious meals and meet the nutrient standards.

The Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning Approach

Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (sometimes called “Assisted NuMenus”) is a variation of Nutrient Standard Menu Planning. It is for schools that lack the technical resources to conduct nutrient analysis themselves. Instead, schools have an outside source, such as another school district, State agency or a consultant, plan and analyze a menu based on local needs and preferences. The outside source also provides schools with recipes and product specifications to support the menus. The menus and analyses are periodically updated to reflect any changes in the menu or student selection patterns.

Here are the required minimums for nutrients and calories for these nutrient standard menu planning approaches:

MINIMUM NUTRIENT AND CALORIE LEVELS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES NUTRIENT STANDARD MENU PLANNING APPROACHES (SCHOOL WEEK AVERAGES)				
NUTRIENTS AND ENERGY ALLOWANCES	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS			OPTIONAL
	Preschool	Grades K-6	Grades 7-12	Grades K-3
Energy allowances (calories)	517	664	825	633
Total fat (as a percentage of actual total food energy)	¹	^{1, 2}	²	^{1, 2}
Saturated fat (as a percentage of actual total food energy)	¹	^{1, 3}	³	^{1, 3}
RDA for protein (g)	7	10	16	9
RDA for calcium (mg)	267	286	400	267
RDA for iron (mg)	3.3	3.5	4.5	3.3
RDA for Vitamin A (RE)	150	224	300	200
RDA for Vitamin C (mg)	14	15	18	15

¹ The Dietary Guidelines recommend that after 2 years of age “...children should gradually adopt a diet that, by about 5 years of age, contains no more than 30 percent of calories from fat.”

² Not to exceed 30 percent over a school week

³ Less than 10 percent over a school week

Alternate Menu Planning Approach

This menu planning approach allows states and school districts to develop their own innovative approaches to menu planning, subject to the guidelines established in our regulations. These guidelines protect the nutritional and fiscal integrity of the program.

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