

# Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools

## Recommended Nutrition Standards for Foods Outside of School Meal Programs

Learn about the Institute of Medicine's *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools* and  
What Students Can Do To Support Them

Since school is a place where you can learn about how to eat a healthy diet, it makes sense to have food and drink options available there. Did you know that the foods and drinks offered through your school's meal program must meet certain nutritional requirements? Well, they do. Did you know that many schools sell foods and drinks in the à la carte line in the cafeteria, school stores, snack bars, or vending machines that are not required to meet any nutritional requirements? That's right. These foods are called "competitive foods" because they compete with school meals.

Recently, a national group of scientific experts from the Institute of Medicine issued recommended standards for competitive foods. The report, entitled *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools*, recommend that U.S. schools examine the nutritional quality of foods and drinks sold or provided as snacks and make sure they meet minimum nutritional standards. As a result of the recommendations, some schools have chosen to change their snack food to healthier fare. However, many schools continue to offer or sell foods and drinks that do not meet the recommended standards.

For schools that offer or sell foods outside of school meals, some of the recommended foods and drinks include

- Fruits and vegetables (fresh or packaged with no added sugars).
- Whole grains, such as whole-grain cereals or breads.
- Fat-free, low-fat milk and milk products (including lactose-free milk and soy-based beverages).
- 100% fruit juice (4 oz. for elementary students; 8 oz. for middle/high school students).
- Plain water.

**Ask for Better Snack Foods  
and Drinks at Your School!**

Schools are also being asked to *stop* offering certain foods and drinks (those high in sugar, fat, sodium, and calories) in cafeterias, vending machines, stores, snack bars, or at fundraising events and school and classroom parties. These items typically include

- Soft drinks, such as soda or "pop."
- Candy/gum.
- Cookies.
- Snack cakes.
- Regular potato chips.
- Other high-fat, high-calorie foods and drinks.

For afterschool activities for high school students only, the requirements are somewhat broader and allow for additional snacks and beverages that are not too high in sugar or fat.



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## Healthier Food Options Explained

Grade Level/Time of Day	Examples of Foods that Can Be Offered
For elementary, middle, and high school students before, during, and after school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual fruits—apples, pear slices, or fruit cups packed in juice or water.</li> <li>• Vegetables—baby carrots, broccoli, edamame.</li> <li>• Dried or dehydrated fruit—raisins, apricots, cherries, bananas (without added sugars or fat).</li> <li>• 100% fruit juice or 100% low-salt vegetable juice.</li> <li>• Low-fat, low-salt whole-grain crackers or chips.</li> <li>• Whole-grain, low-sugar cereals.</li> <li>• 100% whole-grain mini bagels.</li> <li>• 8-oz servings of low-fat or fat-free fruit-flavored yogurt with no more than 30 g of sugars.</li> <li>• 8-oz servings of low-fat or fat-free chocolate or strawberry milk with no more than 22 g of sugars.</li> <li>• Low-sodium, whole-grain bars containing sunflower seeds, almonds, or walnuts (products like these must meet sugar, portion, and grain standards).</li> </ul>
For high school students only, after school only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-sodium baked potato chips (200 mg or less), crackers, and pretzels low in sugar and fat.</li> <li>• Animal crackers with no more than 35% of calories from sugars.</li> <li>• Graham crackers with no more than 35% of calories from sugars.</li> <li>• Caffeine-free, calorie-free, nonfortified soft drinks.</li> <li>• Ice cream bars low in sugar and fat.</li> </ul>

### What can you do to support nutrition standards for foods outside of the school meal program at your school?

- Find out what the competitive food policies are at your school.
- Tell your parents, teachers, and principal that you want snack foods and drinks that meet science-based nutritional standards to be offered in your school.
- Ask for foods and drinks that meet the recommended nutrition standards to be used for school fundraising events, classroom celebrations, and other school-based activities.
- Make smart snack choices, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Educate your fellow students about nutrition so they can become advocates for promoting healthy options in your school.
- Research and write an article about the recommended standards for competitive foods for the student newspaper or Web site. Information is available from the Institute of Medicine ([www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx)).
- Read information about the recommended standards during student announcements or post it prominently on school bulletin boards.

### Where can you get more information?

- Stallings VA, Yaktine AL, editors. *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way Toward Healthier Youth*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2007. Available at [www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx).
- CDC. *Healthy Youth: Nutrition and the Health of Young People*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2007. Available at [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/facts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/facts.htm).
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2005. Available at [www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/default.htm](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/default.htm).



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