



Nutrition Standards for School Meals

In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released [long-term federal nutrition standards](#) for school meals, updating rules established following passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. New mandates include sugar limits and further sodium reductions to be phased in beginning in 2025. Schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs must meet the following standards.

More fruits and vegetables: Since 2012, schools offer students larger portions of fruits and vegetables with every [lunch](#). Choices must include weekly offerings of dark green vegetables, red/orange vegetables, and beans, peas or lentils. Every school [breakfast](#) must offer students a full cup of fruits or vegetables. Students are required to take at least one half-cup serving of fruits or vegetables with every school breakfast and lunch.

Whole grains: At least 80% of the grains offered with school meals must be whole grain-rich (containing at least 50% whole grains).

Calorie limits: School meals must meet age-appropriate calorie minimums and maximums:

| Grades | Breakfast | Lunch |
|--------|------------------|------------------|
| K-5: | 350-500 calories | 550-650 calories |
| 6-8: | 400-550 | 600-700 |
| 9-12: | 450-600 | 750-850 |

Sodium limits: The following limits apply to the average amount of sodium in meals offered during the week.

National School Lunch Program Sodium Limits

| | Target 1 (effective July 2014) | Target 1A (effective July 2023) | Target 2 (effective July 2027) |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Grades K-5: | ≤1,230 mg | ≤1,110 mg | ≤935 mg |
| Grades 6-8: | ≤1,360 | ≤1,225 | ≤1,035 |
| Grades 9-12: | ≤1,420 | ≤1,280 | ≤1,080 |

School Breakfast Program Sodium Limits

| | Target 1 (effective July 2014) | Target 2 (effective July 2027) |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Grades K-5: | ≤540 mg | ≤485 mg |
| Grades 6-8: | ≤600 | ≤535 |
| Grades 9-12: | ≤640 | ≤570 |

Sugar limits: New added sugar limits for breakfast cereal (≤6 g/oz), yogurt (≤12 g/6 oz) and flavored milk (10 g/8 oz) take effect in July 2025. In addition, beginning July 2027, schools must limit added sugars to a weekly average of less than 10 percent of calories per meal.

Limits on unhealthy fat: No more than 10 percent of the calories in school meals can come from saturated fat.

Low-fat and fat-free milk: Every school meal offers one cup of fat-free or 1 percent milk. Schools that choose to offer flavored milk options must also offer unflavored milk.

Free water: Free drinking water must be available in the cafeteria during lunch and breakfast.