

# School Lunches Get a Makeover

You may have heard that the nutrition standards for school meals were recently updated. But what does that mean for your child?

The National School Lunch Program provides meals to tens of millions of children each day, accounting for a significant portion of students' recommended daily calorie needs. In exchange for participating in the National School Lunch Program (which sets minimum nutrition guidelines for meals), schools receive a reimbursement for each qualifying meal provided in school. Your school also can receive an additional reimbursement of six cents per lunch if they meet the updated standards.



## *Why new school lunch standards?*



You've probably heard the facts before: Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in the United States have tripled. Today, more than 23 million children and teens are overweight or obese, which places them at increased risk for serious diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Ensuring that school meals are healthy and in line with current nutrition science is important for kids' health as well as for academics. Research shows that students who do not have reliable, healthy meals in kindergarten are noticeably behind their peers in reading and math by the third grade.

Given these concerns and advancements in nutrition, school nutrition standards were recently updated and school nutrition programs across the country are working to make school lunches healthier.

## *Healthier school meals: What's on the menu?*

The school lunch changes include more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; a shift to low-fat or nonfat milk; and limits on calories, sodium, and unhealthy fats.

## School Lunch Makeover: Before and After

	Before	After
<b>Fruits</b>	½ - ¾ cup per day (fruit and vegetable combined)	½ - 1 cup per day
<b>Vegetables</b>		¾ - 1 cup per day (with weekly amounts of specific types)
<b>Meat/ meat alternative*</b>	At least 1-2 oz per day	Grades K – 5: at least 1 oz per day, 8 – 10 oz eq per week Grades 6 – 8: at least 1 oz per day, 9 – 10 oz eq per week Grades 9 – 12: at least 2 oz per day, 10 – 12 oz eq per week
<b>Grains*</b>	At least 1 serving per day, and 8 servings per week across all grades	Grades K – 5: 1 oz per day, 8 – 9 oz eq per week Grades 6 – 8: 1 oz per day, 8 – 10 oz eq per week Grades 9 – 12: 2 oz per day, 10 – 12 oz eq per week
<b>Whole grains</b>	Encouraged, but not required	At least half of grains served should be whole grain-rich
<b>Milk</b>	1 cup per day (variety of fat contents allowed)	1 cup per day of low fat (1% fat) or nonfat milk. Only nonfat milk can be flavored.
<b>Calories maximums</b> (averaged across the week)	None	Grades K – 5: 650 calories Grades 6 – 8: 700 calories Grades 9 – 12: 850 calories
<b>Sodium</b>	No limits	<b>Target for 2014 – 2015 school year:</b> Grades K – 5: less than 1230 mg per lunch Grades 6 – 8: less than 1360 per lunch Grades 9 – 12: less than 1420 per lunch
<b>Fat</b>	<b>Saturated fat:</b> <10% of calories <b>Trans fat:</b> no limits	<b>Saturated fat:</b> < 10% of calories <b>Trans fat:</b> 0 g

\*One ounce “equivalent” (eq) may be required for some foods in the meat and grain groups, because a different amount is needed to provide the “equivalent” nutritional value

### Help support healthier school lunches

- See the improvements to school lunches firsthand; have lunch with your child.
- Review the school menu or ask your child what is being served.
- Contact your district to find out how you can support the healthy school meals.
  - Engage other parents to support the school nutrition program.
  - Offer to organize a taste test for new recipes and foods.
  - Join your school’s wellness policy or health committee (or start one).
  - Point your school food service program toward technical assistance and training opportunities (see <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/best-practices> or <http://www.nfsmi.org/>).
  - Serve your child more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains at home so they are familiar with them at school.
- Congratulate your school on the hard work they’ve put in to improving the nutritional quality of school meals for our kids!



### Where can you get more information?

- [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/healthierschoolday](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/healthierschoolday)
- [www.healthyschoolfoodsnow.org](http://www.healthyschoolfoodsnow.org)
- [www.schoolfoods.org](http://www.schoolfoods.org)