School Nutrition Programs

School nutrition programs have a long history of meeting the food and nutrition needs of children. Children need to be well nourished and school meals help meet this goal.

School nutrition programs must meet nutrition standards. By law, the meals offered in schools that are part of the national program must provide

- one-fourth of a student’s daily nutrition needs at breakfast.
- one-third of a student’s daily nutrition needs at lunch.

School nutrition programs also promote good health for a lifetime. Foods and eating habits encouraged in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans are emphasized in school nutrition programs.

School meals are offered to all students. Children from homes with limited incomes may have access to free or reduced-price meal benefits. School nutrition staffs work hard to meet the needs of all students.

School Nutrition Standards

Meals must meet minimums for these nutrients:
- Protein
- Energy (calories)
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin C
- Calcium
- Iron

The meals also limit these nutrients:

- Total fat – not more than 30% of total calories over the menu week
- Saturated fat – less than 10% of total calories over the menu week

Each state monitors and may set meal standards to meet current dietary guidelines:
- Increase fiber-rich whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes
- Decrease foods high in sodium/salt
- Limit foods rich in dietary cholesterol

For more information, contact NFSMI at 800-321-3054 or www.nfsmi.org
Most school nutrition programs are self-supporting and operate on a limited budget. All program costs (food, labor, equipment, and supplies) are funded by the meal price and federal money. Most often, school nutrition programs have a separate budget in the school district and do not receive local tax money.

Programs must follow rules to receive federal money.

When students eat with school nutrition programs, they can apply health and nutrition lessons from the classroom. Support efforts to link the classroom with your school nutrition program. Help students practice good health every day. Support school nutrition.

Schools meals are an option for all school staff and a real value, too! Be a great role model and eat school meals with students. They learn from everything you do.
Special Nutrition Needs for Disabilities

Students with disabilities may need meals that differ from the school meal offered. Changes in foods or nutrients can help these students reach their potential and manage health concerns.

Because school nutrition programs must follow federal rules, any changes to the meals need to follow a few simple steps. To request school meal changes, families work with the school nutrition staff. The Special Nutrition Needs for Disabilities section explains the steps.

Special Nutrition Needs for Disabilities

Families follow these simple steps to request a change in school meals for disability reasons.

- **Have a licensed physician provide a signed statement.** The statement must describe the student’s disability, how the disability limits a major life activity, how it affects food and nutrition needs, and the specific changes needed. Your school system may have a form that can be used for this purpose.

- **Return the information as soon as possible.** After the information is returned, the school nutrition program makes the changes to school meals. Reasonable changes to meals are made at no extra charge.

Disabilities Are Protected by Law

Laws require school nutrition programs to make changes as needed for students with documented disabilities.

“A person with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.” (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2001). Examples of disabilities include cerebral palsy, diabetes, and food anaphylaxis (severe food allergy).

The school nutrition program must have a signed physician’s statement on file before any changes can be made to a student’s meals.

For more information, contact NFSMI at 800-321-3054 or www.nfsmi.org
School Nurses
Help your school nutrition program meet a student’s special nutrition needs. Here are some ways:

- Know your school nutrition program’s process.
- Refer families to your school’s nutrition program contact person.
- Include school nutrition staff in the student’s IEP, 504, or other team meetings.
Students with medical conditions, but not disabilities, may need meals that differ from the school meal offered. Changes in foods or nutrients can help these students manage health concerns. School nutrition programs are often able to meet these special nutrition needs.

Because school nutrition programs must follow federal rules, any changes to the meals need to follow a few simple steps. The following information explains the steps.

Medical or Other Dietary Needs
Families follow these simple steps to request a change in school meals for health concerns that are not considered a disability.

• Have a recognized medical authority provide a medical statement. The statement must describe the student’s medical condition, how it affects food and nutrition needs, and the specific changes needed. Your school system may provide a form that can be used. A recognized medical authority is a
  • Physician
  • Physician assistant
  • Nurse practitioner
  • Other health professionals specified by the State agency.

Federal Guidance for Medical or Other Special Dietary Needs
“The school nutrition program is encouraged, but not required, to provide food substitutions or modifications for children without disabilities with medically certified special dietary needs who are unable to eat regular meals as prepared.” (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2001). Examples of medical conditions that may require special dietary needs include overweight, lactose intolerance, or other food sensitivities.

A recognized medical authority must identify a student’s special dietary needs before any changes can be made.

The school nutrition program will make decisions on requests for special nutrition needs that are not based on a disability on a case-by-case basis.
Special Nutrition Needs for Health Concerns not Considered Disabilities, continued

- Return the signed medical statement as soon as possible. After the information is returned, the school nutrition program decides which changes the program can provide. Reasonable changes to meals may be approved and made at no extra charge.

School Nurses

Help your school nutrition program meet a student’s special nutrition needs. Here are some ways:
- Know your school nutrition program’s process.
- Refer families to your school’s nutrition program contact person.
- Include school nutrition staff in the student’s team meetings.

School Nutrition and Diabetic Meal Plans

It takes a team to meet the needs of students with diabetes. The school nutrition program teams up with school nursing staff to help students. Know what to expect from your school nutrition program. Be ready to help and support the work of these important team members.

School nurses can expect school nutrition programs to provide:

- Menus and portion size information.
- The carbohydrate content of foods served on the menus.
- Menu item changes to the planned menu, as needed.
- Changes in standard serving sizes of a food, when needed.
- Pre-portioned foods for items usually offered on a self-serve bar.
- Special need meals prepared with care.

School nutrition programs balance many demands while meeting special needs.

Meal changes need to be reasonable, using common foods when possible.

The demands of meal service prevent nutrition staff from giving individual attention once a student leaves the serving line.

When portion sizes for diabetic meals differ from school nutrition standards, specific instructions help nutrition staff meet a student’s special needs.

Nutrition staff cannot make any changes to a student’s meal without written doctor’s orders. New written orders, as needed, help support timely changes.
This project has been funded at least in part by the Delta Health Alliance (DHA) through HRSA Grant Number U1FRH0741. The Delta Health Alliance is a non-profit organization based in Stoneville, Mississippi, that advocates, develops, and implements collaborative programs to improve the health of citizens in the Delta through the support of partnerships that increase access and availability of health care, conduct and apply health research, or offer health education programs that foster healthy lifestyles. For more information about the Delta Health Alliance visit www.deltahealthalliance.org.

Permission to use DHA's logo must be obtained through DHA's single point of contact prior to use.

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School Nutrition and Meal Plans for Food Anaphylaxis (Severe Food Allergy)

It takes a team to meet the needs of students with life-threatening food allergies. The school nutrition program teams up with school nursing staff to help students. Know what to expect from your school nutrition program. Be ready to help and support the work of these important team members.

School nurses can expect school nutrition programs to provide:

- Recipes for foods served on the menu.
- The ingredient lists for foods served on the menu.
- Menu item changes to the planned menu, as needed.
- Pre-portioned foods for items usually offered on a self-serve bar to avoid cross-contact.
- Special need meals prepared with care, with special attention to avoid cross-contact.

School nutrition programs balance many demands while meeting special needs.

Meal changes need to be reasonable, using common foods when possible.

The demands of meal service prevent nutrition staff from giving individual attention once a student leaves the serving line.

When certain foods must be avoided due to a severe allergy, specific instructions help nutrition staff meet a student’s special needs.

Nutrition staff needs to know what to do in case of an emergency. Keep school nutrition staff updated on action plans for accidental exposure.
Special Nutrition and Meal Plans for Food Anaphylaxis (Severe Food Allergy), continued
School Nutrition and Meal Plans for Food Allergies

It takes a team to meet the needs of students with food sensitivities or non-life-threatening allergies. The school nutrition program reviews the medical statement and determines the changes it can provide. Know what to expect from your school nutrition program. Be ready to help and support the work of these important team members.

School nurses can expect school nutrition programs to provide:

- Recipes for foods served on the menu.
- The ingredient lists for foods served on the menu.
- Menu item changes to the planned menu, as needed.
- Pre-portioned foods for items usually offered on a self-serve bar to avoid cross-contact.
- Meals prepared with care, with special attention to avoid cross-contact.

School nutrition programs balance many demands while meeting special needs.

Meal changes need to be reasonable, using common foods when possible.

The demands of meal service prevent nutrition staff from giving individual attention once a student leaves the serving line.

When a student has an allergy or food sensitivity, specific details help nutrition programs meet needs.

Keep school nutrition staff updated on action plans for accidental exposure.
School Nutrition and Meal Plans for Food Allergies, continued

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It takes a team to meet the needs of students with health concerns such as celiac disease. The school nutrition program teams up with school nursing staff to help students. Know what to expect from the school nutrition program. Be ready to help and support the work of these important team members.

School nurses can expect school nutrition programs to provide:
- Recipes for foods served on the menu.
- The ingredient lists for foods served on the menu.
- Menu item substitutions for foods containing gluten.
- Pre-portioned foods for items usually offered on a self-serve bar to avoid cross-contact.
- Meals prepared with care, with special attention to avoid cross-contact.

School nutrition programs balance many demands while meeting special needs.

Meal changes need to be reasonable, using common foods when possible.

The demands of meal service prevent nutrition staff from giving individual attention once a student leaves the serving line.

Nutrition staff cannot make any changes to a student’s meal without written doctor’s orders. New written orders, as needed, help support timely changes.

Nutrition staff needs to know what to do in case of an emergency. Keep school nutrition staff updated on action plans for accidental exposure.
School Nutrition and Celiac Disease
Meal Plans, continued