

Sodium Limits for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) final rule, *Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium* (87 FR 6984), established transitional standards for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meals effective July 1, 2022. These standards were intended to encourage the reintroduction of lower sodium foods and meals to students and provide the food industry with additional time to develop and test lower sodium products that are palatable to students.

Effective July 1, 2024, the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (89 FR 31962), maintains the current sodium limits for lunch and breakfast through school year 2026-27 (June 30, 2027) and codifies a single sodium reduction for both programs. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the current sodium limits for each grade group at lunch and breakfast through school year 2026-27 (June 30, 2027) and the final sodium limits that take effect by July 1, 2027. Sodium levels are listed in milligrams (mg).



- **NSLP:** By school year 2027-28, school food authorities (SFAs) must implement a reduction of about 15 percent from current sodium levels.
- **SBP:** By school year 2027-28, SFAs must implement a reduction of about 10 percent from current sodium levels.

Meals offered on average over the week must meet the sodium limit for each grade group. The sodium limits do not apply per day, per meal, or per menu item. This allows menu planners to occasionally offer higher sodium meals or menu items by balancing them with lower sodium meals and menu items throughout the week.

The USDA encourages schools to gradually reduce sodium at lunch and breakfast prior to the July 1, 2027, implementation deadline by adjusting food preparation methods and purchasing lower sodium foods.

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Table 1. Sodium limits for lunch

Grades	Current sodium limit (Target 1A) through June 30, 2027	Sodium limit by July 1, 2027
K-5	≤ 1,110 mg	≤ 935 mg
6-8	≤ 1,225 mg	≤ 1,035 mg
9-12	≤ 1280 mg	≤ 1,080 mg
K-8 option ¹	≤ 1,110 mg	≤ 935 mg

¹ The optional lunch meal pattern for grades K-8 may be used by schools with grade configurations that prevent students from being separated into the required K-5 and 6-8 grade groups. This meal pattern requires a narrower calorie range and more restrictive sodium limit because the weekly amounts cannot exceed the highest level for each grade group or go below the lowest level for each grade group.

Table 2. Sodium limits for breakfast

Grades	Current sodium limit (Target 1) through June 30, 2027	Sodium limit by July 1, 2027
K-5	≤ 540 mg	≤ 485mg
6-8	≤ 600 mg	≤ 535mg
9-12	≤ 640 mg	≤ 570 mg
K-8 option ¹	≤ 540 mg	≤ 485mg
6-12 option ¹	≤ 600 mg	≤ 570 mg
K-12 option ¹	≤ 540 mg	≤ 485mg

¹ The optional breakfast meal patterns for grades K-8, 6-12, and K-12 may be used by schools with grade configurations that prevent students from being separated into the required K-5, 6-8, and K-12 grade groups. These meal patterns require a narrower calorie range and more restrictive sodium limit because the weekly amounts cannot exceed the highest level for each grade group or go below the lowest level for each grade group.

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Resources

Be Salt Smart (USDA Choose MyPlate):

<https://www.myplate.gov/tip-sheet/be-salt-smart>

Fact Sheet: Reducing Sodium in the Diets of American Children (American Heart Association):

<https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/About-Us/Policy-Research/Fact-Sheets/Access-to-Healthy-Food/Reducing-Sodium-in-the-Diet-of-US-Children-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Dietary Specifications (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Program webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/dietary-specifications>

Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_dietary_specifications_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf

Implementation Timeline for Updated Nutrition Requirements in School Meals (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/school-nutrition-standards-updates/implementation-timeline-school-meals>

Lowering Sodium in School Foods (American Heart Association):

https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_472940.pdf

Menu Planning Guidance for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals>

Reducing Sodium in Children's Diets infographic (CDC):

<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/children-sodium/infographic.html>

Shaking it Up initiative (Institute of Child Nutrition):

<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/shaking-it-up/>

Sodium ("Dietary Specifications" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/dietary-specifications#Sodium>

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Sodium (USDA's Updates to the School Nutrition Standards webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/school-nutrition-standards-updates/sodium>

USDA Final Rule: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, And Sodium:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-020722>

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for>

USDA Final Rule: Transitional Standards For Milk, Whole Grains And Sodium (87 FR 6984)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/02/07/2022-02327/child-nutrition-programs-transitional-standards-for-milk-whole-grains-and-sodium>

USDA Memo SP 19-2024, CACFP 07-2024, and SFSP 12-2024: Initial Implementation Memorandum: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/initial-implementation-meal-patterns-dga>

USDA Regulations 7 CFR Part 210: National School Lunch Program:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-b/chapter-ii/subchapter-a/part-210>

USDA Regulations 7 CFR Part 220: School Breakfast Program:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-b/chapter-ii/subchapter-a/part-220>

What's in a Meal Module 6: Dietary Specifications (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials>

For more resources, refer to "Sodium" in the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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For more information, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/sodium_limits_nslp_sbp.pdf.

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