



the  
**School Day**  
just got  
**Healthier**  
United States Department of Agriculture

### Why are these changes being made to the school meal nutrition standards?

- **Obesity is a national epidemic that requires bold solutions.** The nation faces an obesity epidemic with nearly 1 in 3 children at risk for preventable diseases like diabetes and heart disease due to overweight and obesity. Left unaddressed, health experts tell us that our current generation of children may well have a shorter lifespan than their parents. Since kids may consume as many as half their meals in schools, school meals play a critical role in helping children learn how to lead healthy lifestyles.
- **Tremendous advancements in our understanding of what a healthy school meal should look like have occurred since the last time the standards were updated.** The nutrition standards for school meals have not been updated since 1995, and the new standards reflect the latest knowledge base about health and nutrition. The standards are based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs) – the Federal government’s benchmark for nutrition – as well as the recommendations of the nutrition experts at the Institute of Medicine (IOM) – a gold standard for scientific analysis.
- **The changes are mandated by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA).** Section 201 of the HHFKA requires USDA to update nutrition standards for school meals based on the recommendations of the DGAs.

### What kind of nutrition will students be getting under the new standards?

- **The new school meals are intended to be high in nutrients and adequate in calories, consistent with the latest nutrition science.** The new portion sizes and calorie ranges also reflect the latest scientific recommendations from nutrition experts on the dietary needs of school children.
- **Under the new science-based standards, school meals are “right-sized” and reflect the appropriate balance between food groups.** Based on their age, students are getting the recommended portions. In addition to lower-fat dairy and leaner proteins, the new school meals offer more fruits and vegetables at lunch– roughly double compared to the previous standards. Whole grains are also increased substantially.
- **School meals are designed to meet only a portion of a child’s nutritional and energy needs over the course of the day.** Breakfasts and lunches are designed to meet roughly *one-fourth* and *one-third*, respectively, of the *daily* calorie needs of school children. Other programs also support nutritional needs and can offer students the additional foods they may need depending on their specific circumstances.
- **School meal standards are in line with dietary recommendations for protein intake.** USDA recommends that children, depending on age and sex, should get about 4-6 ounces of protein foods (e.g., lean meat, poultry, nuts, seeds, and beans, and seafood) *over the course of an entire day*, which will provide protein and other beneficial nutrients. School lunch guidelines, which are intended to ensure that almost all children receive at least one-third of their daily nutritional and energy needs, require a minimum of 1-2 ounces of protein foods *per meal*, consistent with current dietary guidelines. Further, other types of food contribute substantial protein to school meals, including fluid milk, which is part of every school meal.