

LET'S TALK ABOUT SCIENCE AND NUTRITION



Schools that participate in the NSLP are required by law to serve meals that are consistent with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(DGAs\)](#), which are national recommendations based on the latest nutrition science. These guidelines recommend healthy eating patterns that will help kids learn, grow, and be healthy.

Congress gives USDA the responsibility to establish the meal pattern based on DGAs. Schools play an important role in making sure children and teens get the nutrition they need during the day. School lunches also have to meet average weekly amounts for calories (energy), saturated fat, and sodium (salt).



Meal Component	Minimum per day for grades 6-8	Minimum per week for grades 6-8
Fruits	½ cup	2½ cup
Vegetables*	¾ cup	3¾ cup
Grains**	1 ounce equivalent	8-10 ounce equivalents
Meats and Meat Alternates	1 ounce equivalent	9-10 ounce equivalents
Milk	1 cup	5 cups

*Schools must serve vegetables from each of the vegetable sub-groups (dark-green, red and orange, beans and peas, starchy, and other vegetables) each week.

**Grains offered as part of school meals must be made with a certain amount of whole grains.



The meal pattern requirements are one reason the pizza served during your school lunch is different than the frozen pizza you get at home or the pizza from restaurants. The crust is whole grain and the cheese may be lower in saturated fat or sodium. The pizza was developed specifically for schools to meet these requirements.

Schools often offer multiple choices at lunch. What you choose on the lunch line and what you eat can make a big difference. If you choose to eat foods from each of the meal components (fruits, vegetables, meats and meat alternates, grains, and milk), you will be more likely to eat all of the nutrients you need to be healthy and strong, such as calcium for strong bones, potassium for healthy blood pressure, vitamin C for wound healing, fiber for digestive health, and more. The *School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study*⁵ found that school lunches are more nutritious and more likely to follow the DGAs than lunches that came from other sources.

Remember the vegetables, milk, and fruits that students are throwing away? When you throw out those foods, you're also throwing out important nutrients.

5. www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study