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School Lunch Requirements Using Food Based Menus

by Darlene Martin, Extension Nutrition Specialist

Food Based Menus are one of the menu planning options in the USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children. The other three are Traditional Menus, NuMenus, and Assisted NuMenus. The objective of all of the menu planning systems is to meet nutritional goals.

With Food Based Menus the school is not required to conduct a nutrient analysis of the menus. The Nebraska State Department of Education will do so as part of the five-year administrative review.

In Food Based Menus, it is necessary to increase the calories from lowfat foods to replace the calories lost from reductions in total fat. Meals low in fat may be too low in calories if the calories are not increased from other foods such as whole grains, breads, cereals, vegetables, and fruits.

With Food Based Menus, foods from specific food groups and in specific quantities must be offered. The meal pattern for Food Based Menus consists of five food items: meat/meat alternate, grains/breads, two different vegetables and/or fruits, and milk.

The Traditional Meal Pattern has been successful in providing adequate calories and most nutrients. It did not, however, have quantitative limits for fat and saturated fat, nor encourage an increase in complex carbohydrates and dietary fiber. The goal in revising the Traditional Pattern into a plan for good health was to retain the component structure of the Traditional Meal Pattern and as many other features as possible (such as the serving sizes and the types of foods in the components) to facilitate implementation at the local level.

Food Based Menus are an enhancement of the Traditional Meal Pattern.

Changes from the Traditional Meal Pattern which are now a part of Food Based Menus include the following:

- Two required groups for grades K-6 and 7-12.
- Increased quantities of vegetables/fruits and grains/breads for lunch.
- Grains-based desserts may count toward lunch grains/breads.

There is no change in the following:

- Types of food components and items offered.
- Minimum quantity requirements.
- Serving size criteria.
 - What constitutes a 1/4 cup serving of canned peaches?
 - How much cereal qualifies as one bread equivalent?

Food Based Menus — Key Points

- Similar to the current or Traditional Meal Pattern.
- Food components and food items are required.
- Minimum quantities are established by grade levels.
- Increased serving sizes for fruits/vegetables and breads/grains.
- May see higher food costs; schools definitely need to consider Offer Versus Serve.
- No computer required; however, still must meet nutrient standards.
- Can lead to computerization gradually.
- Meal compliance is measured daily; nutritional analysis is measured weekly.

Required Grade Groups

The grade groups for the lunch meal plans for Food Based Menus are:

- Ages 1-2
- Preschool
- Grades K-6
- Grades 7-12
- Plus optional group for grades K-3

The calorie and nutrient needs of children vary by their sex, age, size, and activity level. The calorie standards for breakfast and lunch are estimates of the minimum energy needed. Some children, especially older males, may require considerably more than the minimum. Children who are large for their age or more active also need more calories. Menu planners should adjust the amounts of foods served to provide for the calorie needs of all children.

Food Based Menus — Meal Pattern for Lunch

Minimum Quantities for Food Based Menus Lunch

Meal Component	Required				Option
	Ages 1-2	Preschool	Grades K-6	Grades 7-12	Grades K-3
Milk (as a beverage)	6 fl. oz.	6 fl. oz.	8 fl. oz.	8 fl. oz.	8 fl. oz.
Meat or Meat Alternate (quantity of the edible portion as served)					

Lean meat, poultry, or fish	1 oz.	1 1/2 oz.	2 oz.	2 oz.	1 1/2 oz.
Cheese	1 oz.	1 1/2 oz.	2 oz.	2 oz.	1 1/2 oz.
Large egg	1/2	3/4	1	1	3/4
Cooked dry beans or peas	1/4 cup	3/8 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	3/8 cup
Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters	2 Tbsp	3 Tbsp	4 Tbsp	4 Tbsp	3 Tbsp
The following may be used to meet no more than 50% of the requirement and must be used in combination with any of the above:					
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds, as listed in program guidance, or an equivalent quantity of any combination of the above meat/meat alternate (1 oz. of nuts/seeds = 1 oz. of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish).	1/2 oz. = 50%	3/4 oz. = 50%	1 oz. = 50%	1 oz. = 50%	3/4 oz. = 50%
Vegetables/Fruits (2 or more servings of vegetables and/or fruits)	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	3/4 cup plus extra 1/2 cup over a week ¹	1 cup	3/4 cup
Grains/Breads Must be enriched or whole grain. A serving is a slice of bread or an equivalent serving of biscuits, rolls, etc., or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, macaroni, noodles, other pasta products, or cereal grains.	5 servings per week ¹	8 servings per week ¹	12 servings per week ¹	15 servings per week ¹	10 servings per week ¹
	Minimum of 1/2 per day ²	Minimum of 1 per day ²	Minimum of 1 per day ²	Minimum of 1 per day ²	Minimum of 1 per day ²

¹ For the purposes of this chart, a week equals five days.

² Up to one grains/breads serving per day may be a dessert.

Food Based Menus — Meal Pattern for Breakfast

Minimum Quantities for Food Based Menus Breakfast

Meal Component	Required			Option
	Ages 1-2	Preschool	Grades K-12	Grades 7-12
Milk (fluid) (as a beverage, on cereal, or both)	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	8 fl. oz.	8 fl. oz.
Juice/Fruit/Vegetable Fruit and/or vegetable; or full-strength fruit juice or vegetable juice	1/4 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Select ONE serving from each of the following components or TWO from one component:				
Grains/Breads One of the following or an equivalent combination:				
Whole grain or enriched bread	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice	1 slice
Whole grain or enriched biscuit, roll, muffin, etc.	1/2 serving	1/2 serving	1 serving	1 serving
Whole grain, enriched or fortified cereal	1/4 cup or 1/3 oz.	1/3 cup or 1/2 oz.	3/4 cup or 1 oz.	3/4 cup or 1 oz. <i>Plus</i> an additional serving of one of the grains/breads above
Meat or Meat Alternates				
Meat/poultry or fish	1/2 oz.	1/2 oz.	1 oz.	1 oz.
Cheese	1/2 oz.	1/2 oz.	1 oz.	1 oz.

Egg (large)	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2
Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters	1 Tbsp	1 Tbsp	2 Tbsp	2 Tbsp
Cooked dry beans and peas	2 Tbsp	2 Tbsp	4 Tbsp	4 Tbsp
Nuts and/or seeds (as listed in program guidance) ¹	1/2 oz.	1/2 oz.	1 oz.	1 oz.

¹ No more than 1 oz. of nuts and/or seeds may be served in any one meal.

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