



# Serving a Healthy Breakfast

## HEALTHY BREAKFASTS

### Delivering Healthy Meals to Hungry Students

Healthy eating patterns formed during childhood are attributed to healthier eating patterns in later years. Studies have shown that students who eat school meals eat more servings of vegetables and grains, drink more milk, and consume fewer sweetened beverages and foods high in added fats and sugars than students who make other food choices. By choosing the reimbursable meal, students are assured a meal that meets national nutrition standards and complies with the recommendations of the ***Dietary Guidelines for Americans***. Research shows that students who eat breakfast at school have increased standardized achievement test scores, improved attendance and reduced tardiness. Other research shows that students who eat breakfast have improved academic, behavioral, and emotional functioning.

### What is a healthy breakfast?

A healthy breakfast should consist of a variety of foods, for example, low-fat or fat free milk, whole grains, lean meats or meat alternates, and fruits and vegetables. Offering these menu items will help provide a variety of nutrients and keep students and ready to learn until lunchtime.

There are many menu options for a healthy breakfast. To make a healthy breakfast each day, offer a variety of items from the following food components:

- **Fruits and vegetables.** Fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits and vegetables, 100 percent juice without added sugar
- **Grains.** Whole-grain rolls, bagels, hot or cold whole-grain cereals, low-fat bran muffins, whole grain crackers
- **Milk.** Fat free or low-fat milk
- **Meats and Meat Alternatives.** Hard-boiled eggs, peanut butter, beans, lean slices of meat and poultry, low-fat yogurt, low-fat cheeses such as cottage cheese or low fat cheese sticks

## **THE BREAKFAST MEAL PATTERN (SY 2014-2015 AND BEYOND)**

Breakfast consists of 3 components from three food groups:

1. **milk**
2. **fruit**
3. **grains**
  - meat/meat alternate (optional)

### **Fruit**

There is a minimum daily requirement of 1 cup and a total weekly requirement of 5 cups for all three age/grade groups. Students must select at least a ½ cup of fruit to count toward a reimbursable meal under Offer versus Serve. To enhance menu planning flexibility, schools have the option to offer vegetables in place of all or part of the required fruit component at breakfast. This can also be a potential cost control measure.

Fruit may be offered in several different forms. These forms include: fresh, frozen, canned in juice or light syrup, and dried. However, no more than half of fruit offerings may be in the form of juice, and only 100% juice can be served. For crediting purposes, dried fruit is credited as twice the volume as served.

### **Grains**

There is a minimum daily requirement of 1 ounce equivalent for all three age/grade groups. For grades K-5, at least 7 oz equivalents must be offered each week. For grades 6-8, the weekly minimum is 8 ounce equivalents, and for grades 9-12, at least 9 ounce equivalents. In the meal pattern chart, you will see that there are overlaps in the weekly amounts across all levels (grades K-12). This will be helpful for schools where students' age/grade groups extend beyond those set in the new meal pattern.

Beginning School Year 2014-15, all grains offered at breakfast must be whole-grain rich.

Once schools meet the daily minimum grain, they are allowed to offer a meat/meat alternate and credit it toward the weekly grains component, where a 1 ounce equivalent of a meat/meat alternate credits as a 1 ounce equivalent of grains.

### **Milk**

There is a minimum daily requirement of 1 cup and a total weekly requirement of 5 cups for all three age/grade groups. Additionally, schools must offer a variety of milk options. These include: fat-free (unflavored or flavored), low-fat (unflavored only), and fat-free or low-fat (lactose reduced or lactose-free). Schools must offer at least two choices each day within the types of milk listed. Students are able to decline the milk component under offer versus serve.

## **Dietary Specifications**

Breakfasts must also meet a few dietary specifications. This is intended to improve consistency with the Dietary Guidelines and the Dietary Reference Intakes. These specifications are calories, sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat. The standards for calories, sodium, and saturated fat are to be met on average over the school week. However, with regard to trans fat, food products and ingredients used daily will have to contain zero grams of trans fat per serving.

## **CREATIVE MENU IDEAS**

### **Menu Planning Suggestions**

- Consider a cycle menu to facilitate planning/ordering
- Gradually introduce more whole grains to allow students time to adapt new preferences
- Use more fruit (fresh, canned, etc.) rather than juice
- Offer a variety of fruit options to allow the students to select what they prefer

### **Have Fun! Serve the unexpected and you just might surprise your students!**

- Vegetable pizza on whole wheat crust
- Fruit parfait with fresh fruit topped with low-fat yogurt and crispy whole-grain cereal
- Vegetables, beans, salsa and low-fat shredded cheeses wrapped in a tortilla
- A smoothie blended from frozen fruits and some low-fat yogurt whole-wheat crackers with low-fat cheese

### **Sample Menus (attached)**

Two sets of sample menus are provided in this toolkit to get you started. There is a traditional hot breakfast choice menu, which comes in a version for students plus a version with serving size and crediting information. There is also a set of cold service menus that can be adapted to work for innovative service methods such as grab and go lines and breakfast in the classroom. Menus should also be adjusted to accommodate local food purchasing, student preferences, etc.

## **ADDITIONAL MENU PLANNING RESOURCES**

### **Smarter Lunchrooms ([www.smarterlunchrooms.org](http://www.smarterlunchrooms.org))**

This USDA-funded research center works to equip school lunchrooms with evidence-based tools that improve child eating behaviors and thus improve the health of children.

It uses six key principles that are based on research on various environmental cues (physical and social) that influence eating behaviors. Research shows that most of our food decisions are heavily influenced by our environment- such as, the size of the container we eat from, or what everyone else is eating, versus our own internal hunger cues. The research center works to identify and develop practical, evidence-based strategies to shape school environments. Research is showing that lunchrooms can be rearranged to nudge students to make healthier choices.

This supports and encourages healthful food choices and behaviors (but never forces anything on anyone); it also minimizes food waste since the student is the one making the decision to select the healthier items.

### *Smarter Lunchrooms Techniques*

These can range from simple, low-cost/no-cost changes to major cafeteria redesigns. Here are some examples of simple, low cost ideas the research center suggests that have been proven to be successful:

- Give creative and appealing names to foods (X-ray vision carrots, grandma’s homemade chicken soup, sweet and crunchy apple slices)
- Display whole fruit in an attractive bowl/basket instead of a stainless steel pan. Place it near the front of the line before the students fill their tray with other foods, and they will be more likely to select the fruit.
- Create signs and use verbal prompts to encourage students to buy fruit. Such as, “Would you like an apple today?” Or “I have some really delicious grapes today- do you want some?”
- Create a “healthy grab and go line” that rewards a student who selects healthier options by getting through the line faster.

### **The Best Practices Sharing Center (<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/bestpractices>)**

This website provides a collection of resources for School Food Authorities and State Agencies to help serve healthy menus that meet school meal regulations. It is also a great way for everyone to share resources they have developed! Examples of materials that can be uploaded and shared on the site include recipes, sample menus, menu planning tools, promotional materials, and signage.

### **Team Nutrition (<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/library.html>)**

#### **Team Nutrition E-Newsletter (<http://bit.ly/TNnews>)**

A great way to find out about new materials is through the Team Nutrition E-Newsletter. The email newsletter is published periodically to share Team Nutrition resources and to share ideas for promoting healthy eating and physical activity through Team Nutrition at the State and local levels. Signing up is easy, at the link shown above.