

Ingredient Resource Guide

As school nutrition professionals, it is important to provide students with high-quality ingredients that help them thrive. Therefore, it can be helpful to obtain knowledge to recognize ingredients that may not be the best choice for students' health and well-being.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide school nutrition professionals with a summary of the USDA's NSLP Meal Pattern requirements to ensure school meals are following guidelines, as well as provide guidance on how to recognize other processed ingredients to limit in school meals.

USDA National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern

USDA Meal Pattern Requirement	USDA Guideline: Average Across Weekly Menus	Why Ingredient Should be Monitored
Saturated fats	Average Across Weekly Menus: < 10% of total calories	Excessive intake is linked to increased risk of heart disease.
Trans fats	Zero grams per serving	Excessive intake is linked to increased risk of heart disease.
Added sugar	No current guidelines Recommended: < 25g/day	Excessive intake is linked to increased risk of obesity, dental issues, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.
Sodium	Average Across Weekly Menus: Grades K-5: < 1,110mg Grades 6-8: < 1,225mg Grades 9-12: < 1,280mg	Excessive intake is linked to increased risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

Additional Ingredients to Monitor

Ingredient to Monitor	How to Recognize	Why Ingredient Should be Monitored
Artificial colors and dyes	Found on Ingredients List: Red 40, Yellow-5, Yellow-6	Excessive intake may be linked to adverse neurobehavioral outcomes.
Artificial sweeteners	Found on Ingredients List: Aspartame, Sucralose, Acesulfame K, Saccharin, Xylitol, Stevia, Neotame, Cyclamate, Alitame	Excessive intake may be linked to increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic disease.
Artificial flavors	Found on Ingredients List as “Artificial Flavor(s)”	Excessive intake may be linked to increased risk of chronic diseases.
Synthetic Preservatives	Found on Ingredients List: Sodium benzoate, potassium bromate, sorbic acid, butylated hydroxy anisole (BHA), butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), High fructose corn syrup (HFCS), nitrites and nitrates, monosodium glutamate (MSG)	Excessive intake of these chemicals may be linked to increased risk of adverse health and developmental effects.
Hormones/Antibiotics	Labeled with the “Certified Organic” Seal = Does NOT contain hormones/antibiotics	Excessive intake may be linked to antibiotic resistance and adverse developmental effects.
Genetically Modified	Label may say:	Excessive intake may

Organism (GMO)	<p>“Bioengineered (BE)” ingredients</p> <p>Labeled with the “Certified Organic” Seal = Does NOT contain GMOs</p> <p>Labeled with the “Non-GMO Project Verified” Label = Does NOT contain GMOs</p>	increase exposure to chemicals and pesticides.
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Additional Resources

- [LifeTime Foundation’s Green Onion Ingredient Guide](#)