



School Lunch and Special Dietary Needs

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in over 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions.

Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, which includes breakfasts and after school snacks in some cases, are required by law to make accommodations for children who are unable to eat the standard prepared meals because of a disability or health issue.

Accommodations may include food substitutions or texture modifications. In order to make such accommodations, schools must have a written statement on file signed by a licensed physician. The physician's statement must identify each of the following:

- The child's disability
- The major life activity affected by the disability
- An explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet
- The food(s) to be excluded from the child's diet
- The foods or choice of foods to be substituted

Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program are required by law to make accommodations for children who are unable to eat the standard prepared meals due to a disability or special health need.

Schools may, at their discretion, make substitutions for students who do not meet the definition of disability under the federal law but are medically certified as having a special dietary need. This might include food intolerances or allergies that do not cause life-threatening anaphylactic reactions. In these cases, the school must have a written statement signed by a

recognized medical authority that identifies the following:

- Identification of the medical or special dietary condition restricting the child's diet
- The food(s) to be omitted from the child's diet
- The food or choice of foods to be substituted

Communication is important, so if you have a child with special dietary concerns and they want to eat school lunch with their peers you are encouraged to:

- Ask for a meeting that includes foodservice staff, if possible
- Review the written statement guide to share information about your child's needs
- Refer to federal guidelines for information
- Request school lunch menu calendars in advance to use for planning

Related Resources

- Accommodating Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Authorities from www.fns.usda.gov
- CDC National Food Allergy Guidelines and Supplemental Resources from www.foodallergy.org



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