

Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs

Program regulations require School Food Authorities (SFAs) to ensure that breakfast, lunch and snack meals offered through the School Meal Programs meet the meal pattern requirements established in the Program regulations. Federal law and USDA regulations further require SFAs to make reasonable modifications to accommodate children with special dietary needs. This includes providing special meals, at no extra charge, to children with a disability when the disability restricts the child's diet.

SFAs are **required** to make meal substitutions for children **with a disability** that restricts his or her diet when supported by a written medical statement from a recognized medical authority; in Florida this includes Licensed Physicians (MD, DO), Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioners (ARNP) and Physician's Assistants (PA).

- The medical statement should include a description of the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the SFA to understand how it restricts the child's diet. It should also include an explanation of what must be done to accommodate the disability. In the case of food allergies, this means identifying the food or foods to be omitted and recommending alternatives. In other cases, more information may be required.
- The American with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008, P.L. 110-235 (ADA Amendments Act) clarified that Congress intends the term disability to be broad and inclusive, and the question of whether a child has a disability should no longer require extensive analysis. After the passage of the ADA Amendments Act, most physical and mental impairments will constitute a disability. For example, digestion is an example of a bodily function that is a major life activity. A child whose digestion is impaired by lactose intolerance may be a person with a disability regardless of whether or not consuming milk causes the child severe distress.

For more information, please refer to [SP 40-2017: 2017 Edition: Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs](#) or the Code of Federal Regulations Title 7 [§210.10 Meal requirements for lunches and requirements for afterschool snacks](#)

SFAs **have the option** to accommodate special dietary needs that do not constitute a disability, including those related to religious or moral convictions or personal preference if the requested modifications can be accomplished within the Program meal pattern.

Meals that do not meet the Program meal pattern are not eligible for reimbursement unless supported by a medical statement.

SFAs may consider expense and efficiency in choosing an appropriate approach to accommodate a child's special dietary needs; however, SFAs are **not** required to provide the specific substitution or other modification requested. SFA's must simply offer a reasonable modification that effectively accommodates the child's special dietary needs and provides equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from the program.

FDACS Reviewed Fluid Milk Substitutions

Company/Product	Protein	Calcium	Vitamin A	Vitamin D	Magnesium	Phosphorus	Potassium	Riboflavin	Vitamin B-12
USDA Criteria Per Cup Minimum Amount Allowable	8 g	276 mg	500 IU	100 IU	24 mg	222 mg	349 mg	0.44 mg	1.1 mcg
	% N/A	27.6%	10%	25%	6%	22.2%	9.7%	25.9%	18.3%
8 th Continent Soy Milk									
8 th Continent Original	8 g	300 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	24 mg	250 mg	360 mg	0.51 mg	1.2 mcg
8 th Continent Vanilla	8 g	300 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	24 mg	250 mg	460 mg	0.51 mg	1.2 mcg
Great Value (Walmart)									
Original Soymilk	8 g	300 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	120 IU = 3.0 mcg	40 mg	250 mg	390 mg	0.51 mg	3 mcg
Kirkland Signature Soy Milk (Costco)									
Organic Soymilk Plain	8 g	390 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	120 IU = 3.0 mcg	42 mg	250 mg	360 mg	0.44 mg	1.2 mcg
Silk Soy Milk (Single Serve)									
Chocolate Soymilk	8 g	470 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	120 IU = 3.0 mcg	65 mg	230 mg	450 mg	0.44 mg	3 mcg
Vanilla Soymilk	8 g	470 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	120 IU = 3.0 mcg	55 mg	230 mg	370 mg	0.44 mg	3 mcg
Sunrich Naturals									
Sunrich Naturals Plain	8 g	300 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	40 mg	250 mg	360 mg	0.44 mg	1.2 mcg
Sunrich Naturals Vanilla	8 g	300 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	40 mg	250 mg	360 mg	0.44 mg	1.2 mcg
Westbrae Natural Westsoy									
Organic Plus	8 g	300 mg	1000 IU = 300 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	65 mg	250 mg	440 mg	0.51 mg	3 mcg
Organic Plus Vanilla	8 g	300 mg	1000 IU = 300 mcg	100 IU = 2.5 mcg	65 mg	250 mg	440 mg	0.51 mg	3 mcg

Ripple Dairy-Free Milk (Pea Protein, Single Serve)									
Original	8 g	440 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	240 IU = 6 mcg	24 mg	491 mg	375mg	0.44 mg	1.1 mcg
Vanilla	8 g	440 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	240 IU = 6 mcg	24 mg	496 mg	375 mg	0.44 mg	1.1 mcg
Chocolate	8 g	440 mg	500 IU = 150 mcg	240 IU = 6 mcg	30 mg	500 mg	470 mg	0.44 mg	1.1 mcg

Reimbursement for modified meals served to children with disabilities that restrict their diet is at the appropriate rate based on the child's eligibility for free, reduced or paid meals for the applicable program, regardless of the meal modification made.

*Manufacturers make changes to products regularly and nutrient content may vary.

- SFA's must offer at least two choices from the following: fat-free milk, low-fat (1%) milk, fat-free or low-fat lactose reduced milk, and fat-free or low-fat lactose-free milk.
- Any written request from the medical authority or the parent/guardian must identify the student's medical or other special dietary needs that restricts the student's diet. No other information is required.
- Lactose-free milk should be the first choice for a student who has lactose intolerance because it provides the same key nutrients found in regular cow's milk and is readily available nationwide. Furthermore, USDA allows lactose-free milk to be provided as part of the reimbursable meal without documentation.
- Water or juice cannot be offered as a fluid milk substitute for a student with medical or special dietary needs. Only a beverage meeting the nutrient standards at the levels specified above may be substituted for fluid milk in the absence of a written medical statement.