

BALANCED GUIDELINES

MAKE SURE HEALTH IS ON THE MENU WITH
THE BALANCED FOOD SERVICE GUIDELINES

These food service guidelines are intended to help institutions create dining environments that promote community health, emphasize high quality foods, value customer satisfaction, and help prevent chronic disease. The guidelines were designed using the best evidence-based nutrition science by experts in public health and disease prevention.



PROTEINS

Animal-source proteins (meat, seafood, poultry)

- Red meat and poultry as lean as possible; seafood should be DHA/EPA-rich varieties
- Prepared using wet, lowest-heat cooking methods (to the greatest extent possible)
- Portion sizes do not exceed 3 oz. for adults or 2 oz. for kids
- Absolutely no processed meat (smoked, salted, cured, treated with nitrates, nitrites, or plant-derived equivalent), or have a plan to phase out processed meat

Plant-source proteins (beans, legumes, nuts, seeds)

- Be present in at least equal measure with animal proteins
- At least one entree centered around plant proteins at each mealtime
- Preference for unprocessed plant proteins (legumes, nuts, seeds) versus processed (e.g., soy nuggets)
- It is strongly recommended that plant-based proteins (and/or oils) containing significant amounts of omega-3 fatty acids be available or incorporated into prepared foods in some form. These may include walnuts, ground flax seeds, ground chia seeds, canola oil, and others.

DAIRY AND PLANT-DERIVED ALTERNATIVES

- Regarding dairy, offer only lowest-fat, unsweetened, lowest-sodium varieties
- Preferably used strictly as condiments, not as central proteins
- Where dairy is offered as a single item for purchase, a plant-derived equivalent (e.g., fortified soy milk or yogurt) must be offered and advertised alongside

GRAINS

- Where 100% whole grains can be used, always take the opportunity
- Where 100% whole grains cannot be used, use whole grain-rich products
- At a minimum, two-thirds of grains products should be 100% whole

PRODUCE

Vegetables

- Offer at least three non-fried vegetable sides at lunch and dinner mealtimes
- Prepared from fresh or frozen
- Canned vegetables discouraged (excluding legumes)
- Green leafy vegetables should be offered daily
- Each entree recipe must incorporate at least one vegetable, not counting toward the three vegetable sides
- Legumes and corn do not count as a vegetables

Fruits

- Offer at least three whole, unsweetened fruit options that are either fresh or prepared from frozen
- Dried fruit also acceptable
- Canned fruit discouraged
- Fruit juices may be available but do not count toward the three fruit options

CONVENIENCE MEALS, SNACKS, AND BEVERAGES

- Ensure that there are at least as many plant protein-centered convenience meal options as animal protein-centered
- Ensure vegetables and/or fruits constitute at least 50% of each meal, regardless of protein source
- Limit the sale of ultraprocessed snack foods and sugar-sweetened beverages to less than 20% of all convenience snacks/beverages available
- Whole food packaged snacks (granola, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, etc.) must be <6 g added sugar, <180 mg sodium, <2 g saturated fat, and >1.5 g fiber per serving

WATER

- Make freely available in unlimited quantities
- Accommodate dispensers for reusable containers
- Make bottled water available when possible and prudent

DESSERTS

- Sat fat content must constitute 10% or fewer of total calories
- <20 mg cholesterol per serving
- An egg-, dairy-, and cholesterol-free option should be available in institutions where desserts are offered
- 100% whole grains where possible, WG-rich otherwise
- Opt for small serving sizes

LABELING

- Discouraged from labelling foods “vegetarian” or “vegan” where not necessary
- Consider calorie and/or %DV saturated fat labeling
- Allergens labeled

NOTES ON COOKING METHODS

- Animal products: avoid high, dry heat methods where lower-heat, wet cooking methods can be used
 - E.g., steamed burgers in place of grilled, braised chicken instead of baked or fried
- In schools, no foods on offer should be fried. In all other institutions, frying is highly discouraged where baking or other cooking methods can substitute. Animal proteins especially should not be fried.

SODIUM

- Entrees should contain <500 mg sodium per serving
- Sides should contain <200 mg sodium per serving
- Sodium in breakfast items should be as low as possible, <400 mg per serving

ADDED SUGAR

- Calories from added sugar content of each item should constitute <5% of total calories (excluding desserts)

SATURATED AND TRANS FATS

Saturated Fat

- Calories from saturated fat content of each item must constitute <7% of total calories (excluding desserts, see above). Every opportunity should be taken to do so when oils rich in poly- and monounsaturated fat (or another nonfat ingredient) can be used in place of saturated fats.

Trans Fat

- No hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils may be used
- No butter or ghee, especially where unsaturated oils or other substitutes can be used

CHOLESTEROL

- Entrees containing animal products should not exceed 80 mg of cholesterol
- Sides should contain <10 mg cholesterol per serving
- 8 oz. beverages should contain <10 mg cholesterol
- Desserts should contain <20 mg cholesterol per serving