

This document summarizes the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Food in Schools*. The Connecticut Nutrition Standards address all foods sold to students separately from a reimbursable school breakfast or lunch. They are based on current nutrition science and national health recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, MyPyramid and national organizations, such as the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Dietetic Association and American Academy of Pediatrics.

The Connecticut Nutrition Standards focus on limiting fats, sodium and added sugars, moderating portion sizes, and promoting increased consumption of nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. The CSDE encourages all schools to use these standards to determine what foods are available at school, including a la carte sales in the cafeteria, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, classroom parties and other school events.

The Connecticut Nutrition Standards group food items into the following five categories: 1) Entree Items; 2) Fruits and Vegetables; 3) Cooked Grains; 4) Soups; and 5) Snacks and Desserts.

## Entree Items<sup>1</sup>

The Connecticut Nutrition Standards differentiate between 1) entree items that are *planned as part of a reimbursable meal and are also sold a la carte*; and 2) entree items that are *sold only a la carte*. If an entree item that is planned and served as part of a reimbursable school meal is also sold a la carte on the same day, it must be the same calories and portion size but does not need to meet any additional nutrition standards.\* If an entree item is *sold only a la carte* (i.e., not part of a reimbursable meal) it must meet the following standards:

- **Calories and Portion Size:** No more than the calorie content and portion size of comparable entree items in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern.
- **Fat:** No more than 35 percent of total calories. No chemically altered fat substitutes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10 percent of total calories.
- **Trans Fats:** Zero trans fats (less than 0.5 gram) per entree.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sugars:** No more than 15 grams of total sugars per entree.<sup>4</sup> No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.<sup>5</sup>
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams per entree.
- **Whole Grains and Fiber:** Increase choices of entrees with whole grains and foods that contain naturally occurring fiber, e.g., vegetables, fruits and legumes. Limit processed products made from refined grains.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.
- **Condiments:** Limit use and provide low-fat, low-sugar and low-sodium varieties.<sup>6</sup>

\* This provision applies only to *entree items that are planned and sold as part of a reimbursable meal and are also sold a la carte the same day*. It does not apply to any other meal items such as breads, fruits, vegetables, soups and cooked grains, e.g., rice and pasta. All other food items that are *part of a reimbursable meal and are also sold separately from the meal* must meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards for the specific food category. For example, french fries that are part of a reimbursable meal can only be sold a la carte if they meet the nutrition standards for the *Fruits and Vegetables* category. Muffins that are part of a reimbursable meal can only be sold a la carte if they meet the nutrition standards for the *Snacks and Desserts* category.

## Healthy Food Certification

Districts that choose to participate in healthy food certification under section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) **must** follow the Connecticut Nutrition Standards for all food items sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals at all times and from all sources. The CSDE *List of Acceptable Food and Beverages* identifies products that meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. For more information, see "Resources" on page 4.

## Definition of Entree Items

For the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, entree items include only three categories of main dish food items: 1) a combination food of meat/meat alternate and grain/bread (e.g., turkey sandwich, pizza, hamburger on a bun and cheese burrito); 2) a combination food of vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate (e.g., chef's salad, fruit and cheese platter, baked potato with chili, chicken vegetable stir-fry); and 3) a meat/meat alternate alone (e.g., sausage patty, egg, chicken nuggets), excluding yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds and nut or seed butters. These foods are addressed by the nutrition standards for the *Snacks and Desserts* category.

## Fruits and Vegetables<sup>1</sup>

This category addresses fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables.

- **Serve whole vegetables and fruits** (fresh, frozen, canned and dried) prepared and packaged without added fats, sugars or sodium. **Limit processed vegetables and fruits** (prepared or packaged with added fats, sugars or sodium).
- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories per serving or package.
- **Fat:** No more than 35 percent of total calories. No chemically altered fat substitutes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10 percent of total calories.
- **Trans Fats:** Zero trans fats (less than 0.5 gram) per serving or package.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and 15 grams per serving or package, except for fruits and vegetables in all forms without added sugars.<sup>4</sup> No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.<sup>5</sup>
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams per serving or package.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.
- **Condiments:** Limit use and provide low-fat, low-sugar and low-sodium varieties.<sup>6</sup>

Fruit roll-ups or fruit snacks that are not 100 percent fruit do not meet the nutrition standards for the *Fruits and Vegetables* category.

## Cooked Grains<sup>1</sup>

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories per serving or package.
- **Fat:** No more than 35 percent of total calories. No chemically altered fat substitutes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10 percent of total calories.
- **Trans Fats:** Zero trans fats (less than 0.5 gram) per serving or package.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sugars:** No more than 15 grams of total sugars per serving or package.<sup>4</sup> No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.<sup>5</sup>
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams per serving or package.
- **Whole Grains and Fiber:** Increase choices of whole grains with no or minimal added fats, sugars and sodium. Limit processed products made from refined grains, e.g., enriched flour.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.
- **Condiments:** Limit use and provide low-fat, low-sugar and low-sodium varieties.<sup>6</sup>

## Soups<sup>1</sup>

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories per serving or package.
- **Fat:** No more than 35 percent of total calories. No chemically altered fat substitutes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10 percent of total calories.
- **Trans Fats:** Zero trans fats (less than 0.5 gram) per serving or package.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sugars:** No more than 15 grams of total sugars per serving or package, except for soups without added sugars whose sugar content is solely due to fruits and vegetables.<sup>4</sup> No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.<sup>5</sup>
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams per serving or package.
- **Whole Grains and Fiber:** Increase choices of soups containing vegetables, legumes and whole grains.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.
- **Condiments:** Limit use and provide low-fat, low-sugar and low-sodium varieties.<sup>6</sup>

## Snacks and Desserts<sup>1</sup>

This category addresses all snack and dessert items, such as chips, crackers, popcorn, cereal, trail mix, nuts, seeds, peanut butter and other nut butters, jerky, cookies, animal/graham crackers, cereal bars, granola bars, bakery items (e.g., pastries, toaster pastries, muffins, soft pretzels, bagels and rolls), frozen desserts, ice cream, cheese, yogurt, pudding and smoothies (made with low-fat yogurt or other low-fat dairy alternatives, fruit or 100 percent juice).

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories per serving or package.
- **Fat:** No more than 35 percent of total calories, with the exception of nuts, seeds, nut or seed butters, and low-fat or reduced fat 100 percent natural cheese. No chemically altered fat substitutes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10 percent of total calories, with the exception of nuts, seeds, nut or seed butters, and low-fat or reduced fat 100 percent natural cheese.
- **Trans Fats:** Zero trans fats (less than 0.5 gram) per serving or package.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and 15 grams per serving or package, except for yogurt, pudding and smoothies.<sup>4</sup> Frozen desserts containing only 100 percent juice or fruit and no added sugars are exempt from the sugar standard. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Smoothies:** No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce for smoothies made with low-fat yogurt or other low-fat dairy alternatives or fruit or 100 percent juice.
  - **Yogurt and Pudding:** No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce.
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams per serving or package.
- **Whole Grains and Fiber:** Serve whole grains and foods that contain naturally occurring fiber most often, e.g., fruits, vegetables and legumes with no or minimal added fats, sugars and sodium. Limit processed grain-based snacks made from refined grains, e.g., enriched flour.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.
- **Condiments:** Limit use and provide low-fat, low-sugar and low-sodium varieties.<sup>6</sup>

## Better Choice Recommendations

The Better Choice Recommendations are in addition to meeting the specific requirements of the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. They are not required but help schools to identify foods that are even better choices. The recommendations vary depending on the food category, but generally include the following:

- no hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils (labels can claim "0" trans fat and still contain these sources of trans fat);
- no artificial flavors or colors;
- no high fructose corn syrup;
- at least 2.5 grams of fiber (a "good" source of fiber as defined by the Food and Drug Administration); and
- 100 percent whole grain (all grains are whole) or contains only whole grains with bran, germ or fiber.

In addition to meeting the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, the CSDE strongly encourages schools to choose foods that also meet the Better Choice Recommendations. The Better Choice Recommendations are included in the green and white columns on the right of the CSDE *List of Acceptable Food and Beverages* (see "Resources" on page 4).

## Beverages

The requirements for beverages allowed for sale to students in public schools are defined by CGS section 10-221q, and are separate from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. The state statute allows only five categories of beverages (milk; nondairy milk such as soy or rice milk; 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices; beverages containing only water and juice; and water), with specific nutrition requirements for each category. For more information on the beverage requirements, see "Resources" on page 4.

## Resources

Competitive Foods in Schools: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/CompetitiveFoods.pdf>

Connecticut Beverage Requirements: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322418>

Connecticut Nutrition Standards: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322422>

Healthy Food Certification: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322420>

List of Acceptable Food and Beverages: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322432>

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<sup>1</sup> Significantly fortified foods and beverages are not allowed unless they are naturally nutrient-rich and fortified with nutrients at levels based on scientifically documented health needs, e.g., milk fortified with vitamins A and D, breakfast cereals fortified with iron, orange juice fortified with calcium or grain products fortified with folic acid. Products containing nutrition supplements (e.g., amino acids, extracts, herbs or other botanicals) are not allowed, regardless of whether their nutrient content meets the Connecticut Nutrition Standards for food or the state statutes for beverages.

<sup>2</sup> Chemically altered fat substitutes are compounds made by chemically manipulating food products to mimic the texture and flavor of fat while providing fewer calories and less metabolizable fat, e.g., Olestra, Olean and Simplese

<sup>3</sup> Trans fats include naturally occurring and artificial sources. Most trans fats (80 percent) come from processed foods and oils. Food labeling regulations allow food labels to state “0 grams” trans fats if a serving contains less than 0.5 gram. To avoid artificial trans fats, read ingredients and select products without partially hydrogenated oils or shortening.

<sup>4</sup> Total sugars include all sources of naturally occurring sugars (e.g., fruits, vegetables and milk) and sugars added to foods, e.g., brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar and syrup.

<sup>5</sup> Common artificial or nonnutritive sweeteners include acesulfame-potassium, aspartame, neotame, saccharin, sucralose and stevia (e.g., Rebiana, Truvia, PureVia and SweetLeaf). Common sugar alcohols include sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, maltitol and erythritol.

<sup>6</sup> Any condiments packaged with a food (e.g., bagel with cream cheese or carrots with dip), must be included when determining compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. If the condiment is not packaged with the item (e.g., the student has a choice whether to take it), then the food is evaluated separately and the condiment is not included.

**For more information, see the *Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Food in Schools* at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/CTNutritionStandards.pdf>.**



The CSDE state nutrition standards committee annually evaluates and revises the Connecticut Nutrition Standards as needed to reflect changes in nutrition science and national health recommendations. For additional information, contact: Susan S. Fiore, M.S., R.D., Nutrition Education Coordinator, Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457, 860-807-2075,

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