

Special Dietary Needs Requirements

School Nutrition Programs



Requirement: Federally funded school nutrition programs must make reasonable modifications to meals for students who have a disability that restricts their diet.

Disability

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities or bodily functions.

- Major life activities include, but are not limited to caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading and concentrating.
- Major bodily functions include but are not limited to functions of the immune system, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine and reproductive functions.

Reasonable Modification

The modification provided must be reasonable.

- It does not have to mirror the menu. Ex: For a dairy allergy, if cheese pizza is the regular menu item, the SFA could offer a different entrée that does not contain dairy, such as a grilled chicken sandwich.
- Specific brands requested do not necessarily need to be provided if the accommodation is appropriate

Reimbursement

Meal accommodations supported by a Medical Statement are reimbursable at the standard meal reimbursement rate. While any additional costs for substituted foods are considered allowable program costs, it is not allowable to charge the student for the extra costs of a modified meal.

Medical Statement

When the requested modification cannot be accommodated within the meal pattern requirements, a medical statement is required. The document must be completed and signed by the child's:

- Physician
- Physician Assistant
- Nurse Practitioner
- Registered Dietitian

The statement must include the following information:

1. The physical or mental impairment and how it restricts the diet;
2. An explanation of what needs to be done to accommodate the disability;
3. The food(s)/ingredients to be omitted from the child's diet and,
4. Recommended substitutes if applicable.

A [Medical Statement Template](#) is available on the Maine DOE Child Nutrition website.

If the child's IEP or 504 Plan includes the same information that is required in a special diet statement, it is not necessary for the school to obtain a separate special diet statement.

Dietary Preferences

These requests are not due to a disability and therefore are not required to be accommodated. Sponsors may choose to offer meal choices that meet these requests however all meal pattern requirements must be met. Examples include lifestyle choices (vegan, vegetarian, organic), health concerns (gluten-free) and religious choices.

- [Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Accommodating Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance and Q&As](#)