

School-Provided Lunches

You can pack lunches and snacks from home for your child, or you can arrange for the school to provide a hot lunch.

Each school will vary in what it provides in terms of meals or cafeteria food. Regulations that require schools to provide school lunches for children with special dietary needs differ from state to state. However, several federal regulations provide the legal basis for requiring schools to offer nutrition services to children with special needs. These include: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that students with disabilities not be excluded from any program which receives Federal Financial Assistance (section 504). Further, as part of the USDA's nondiscrimination regulation, federal law requires that schools make substitutions in foods for children considered to have a disability, and whose disability restricts their diet (7 CFR, Part 15b.3). Additionally, USDA regulation explains school requirements and specifies that schools must serve special meals at no extra charge to students whose disability restricts their diet (7 CFR, Part 15b.26 (d)).

This means that schools need to work with families to provide appropriate meals for children with special dietary needs; however, regulations do vary by state. Some states may only require that schools provide low-protein choices from their regular menus, while others may actually order special low-protein foods for your child's meal. You will need to learn the requirements for your state and work with your child's school to determine the menu for your child's school lunch.

For your child to receive a special school lunch, you may also need medical authorization or need to fill out an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plans. Talk to your child's school about these requirements.

Regardless of your child's school lunch policies, here are some helpful tips for working with the school to ensure your child receives the diet she needs:

- Get to know the Food Services Director and staff.
- Encourage them to contact you with questions about your child's diet.
- Limit the staff trained to prepare food for your child to one or two people.
- Ensure there is a good understanding of your child's special diet to avoid any mistakes in interpreting diet orders.