

Cancer Advocates Applaud USDA Rule Revising School Nutrition Requirements

The new USDA rule revises limits on added sugars in school meals; about 18% of cancers are attributed to excess body weight.

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[On April 24], the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service finalized a new rule to revise the child nutrition program standards to ensure school meals are better aligned with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans and based on the latest nutritional science. School breakfast and school lunch programs offer students nutritious meals and may be the only meals many children eat during the day, especially those from families with limited incomes. Participation in school meal programs reduces food insecurity and improves the diet quality and academic performance of children. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) supports [policies](#) that increase access to free school meals for all children and strengthens the nutrition standards for these meals.

The final rule has a dual approach of adding a product-based added sugars limit for items like breakfast cereals and yogurts beginning in school year 2025–2026 as well as an additional weekly dietary limit of added sugar to less than 10% of calories per week for both school breakfast and lunch programs by school year 2027–2028.

“Ensuring what our children eat in school is aligned with the most up to date nutrition guidelines is important for reducing their lifetime risk of cancer and establishing a healthful lifestyle that can continue through adulthood,” said Lisa A. Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. “This rule is a step in the right direction because higher quality school meals can help promote healthy patterns in adulthood. Poor diet, including the consumption of foods and beverages high in added sugars is a major contributor to excess weight. There is increasing evidence that excess body fat over the course of a lifetime, beginning in childhood, has adverse health consequences, including cancer.”

Approximately 4%-5% of all cancer cases are attributed to poor diet, and 18.2% are attributed to excess body weight, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption and diet combined. In 2020, the American Cancer Society published an updated [Guideline for Diet and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention](#) which emphasizes the importance of an overall healthy dietary pattern, comprised of a variety of vegetables, whole fruit, and whole grains. The guideline also recommends limiting or eliminating red and processed meat, sugary drinks, refined grains and highly-processed foods, in reducing the risk of cancer and boosting overall health. ACS CAN uses the guidelines in advocating

for the improved dietary quality of the school meals [program](#).

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