

ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS REQUESTS

Special Dietary Needs Requests - SFAs are required to provide reasonable modifications to students who have a medical need/disability/impairment. For more information on what constitutes a disability, check out [USDA's Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Professionals](#). A "reasonable modification" is a change or alteration in policies, practices, and/or procedures to accommodate a participating child's disability. Reasonable modifications to effectively accommodate children with disabilities must be made on a case-by-case basis. However, it is up to the SFA to determine if they will offer substitutes for students due to religious or lifestyle choices.

Disability/Physical Impairment within the Meal Pattern

- If there is a medical need/disability/impairment and the meal can be accommodated within the meal pattern (Celiac Disease, single food allergy, texture modifications, etc.), SFAs are not required to obtain a medical statement signed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority and should make those necessary accommodations identified by the household.
- If a SFA would like to have a medical statement, they may ask the household to provide this documentation but cannot delay implementation of the meal accommodation. The SFA must accommodate the student as soon as possible.
- Requests for milk vary slightly. Click [here](#) to review our milk fact sheet for more details about milk substitution requests.

Disability/Physical Impairment outside the Meal Pattern

- If a student needs a substitute due to a medical need/disability/impairment outside the meal pattern (multiple food allergies, tube feedings, etc.), SFAs need a medical statement signed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority such as a physician. With this documentation, these meals are reimbursable.
- When the medical statement is required, it must include:
 - Information about the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the SFA to understand how it restricts the child's diet,
 - An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability, and
 - The food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives, in the case of a modified meal.
- An SFA cannot delay implementation until it receives the medical statement and must accommodate the student as soon as possible.
- If a medical statement is not immediately provided, the SFA must document the initial interaction with the household and should document all attempts to contact the household regarding obtaining a medical statement.
- Requests for milk vary slightly. Click [here](#) to review our milk fact sheet for more details about milk substitution requests.

Religious or Lifestyle Choice

- SFAs are not required to accommodate students for religious or lifestyle choices. If a school elects to make substitutions for one student, the same accommodation should be made for all students with that religious or lifestyle choice.
- If implementing this option, the accommodation must fit within the meal pattern and no documentation is required.
- If implementing offer versus serve, students can decline certain food components/items due to religious or lifestyle choice.
- Requests for milk vary slightly. Click [here](#) to review our milk fact sheet for more details about milk substitution requests.

General Guidelines

1. If there is a medical need/disability/impairment and the meal can be accommodated within the meal pattern (Celiac Disease, single food allergy, etc.), SFAs are not required to obtain a medical statement signed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority and should make those necessary accommodations with household request documentation.
2. If a student needs a substitute due to a medical need/disability/impairment outside the meal pattern (multiple food allergies, tube feedings, etc.), SFAs need a medical statement with the required information signed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority such as a physician.
 - a. If a medical statement is not immediately provided, the SFA must document the initial interaction with the household and should document all attempts to contact the household regarding obtaining a medical statement.
3. Once the need is known for the substitute outside or within the meal pattern, SFAs cannot delay implementation until it receives the proper documentation and must accommodate the student as soon as possible.
 - a. SFAs are encouraged to work with their school nurse, 504 coordinator, others as necessary, and the household to provide the necessary and appropriate accommodations.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.