

Special Dietary Needs

As more children with disabilities enroll in regular school programs and the increased prevalence of food allergies and intolerances among children, it is necessary for school nutrition personnel to understand their role in accommodating children in the school nutrition programs (SNP) with special dietary needs due to a disability.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act has simplified what determines a disability and it should no longer require extensive analysis. School food authorities (SFA) and local educational agencies (LEA) should not be involved in analyzing documentation to determine whether a particular physical or mental impairment is severe enough to qualify as a disability. The ADA Amendments Act amended the definition of disability, broadening it to cover most physical and mental impairments, and the goal is to ensure equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from the SNPs.

SFAs are required to make substitutions to meals for children with a disability that restricts the child's diet on a case-by-case basis and only when supported by a written medical statement from a state licensed healthcare professional.

It is important to know that SFAs continue to have the option to accommodate children with special dietary needs that are not considered a disability. This includes those accommodations related to religious or moral convictions or personal preference. Some examples of personal preference could include: picky eaters, vegetarian, and vegan diets. SFAs are required to follow the meal pattern for optional accommodations for children without a disability to claim reimbursement.

For more information on Special Dietary Needs, see the Quick Reference Guide to [Accommodating Special Dietary Needs](#).

After you have reviewed the information contained in the Quick Reference Guide, try the [Apply Your Knowledge](#) self-check.

The School Nutrition Primer can be utilized by food service directors and administrators as a Professional Standards training resource. Reviewing the **Quick Reference Guides** with staff and administering the **Apply Your Knowledge** self-check quiz may count for 15 minute training.

The training topic Special Dietary Needs provides the following Professional Standards:

Key Area: Nutrition (1000)

Training Topics: Menu Planning (1100)

Learning Objectives: Plan meals to accommodate special diets (1160)

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