

Should you be concerned about added sugars in school breakfast and lunch? A new study says YES.



The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(DGA\)](#) recommends that added sugars be limited to less than 10 percent of daily total calories. **School meal nutrition standards are based on the DGA but a limit on added sugars is the only DGA recommendation that does not have a corresponding nutrition standard for school meals** – there's a total sugar standard for competitive foods (snacks and items sold outside of the reimbursable meal) but it's not aligned with the DGA limit either. The [research study supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Healthy Eating Research program](#) found virtually all schools exceeded the DGA limit for added sugars at breakfast (9 out of 10 schools; 92 percent) and lunch (nearly 7 out of 10 schools; 69 percent) with the major culprits being added sugars in sweetened cereals, muffins and sweet/quick breads offered at breakfast and condiments and toppings, and flavored skim milk at both breakfast and lunch.

Among children, intake of added sugars is associated with increased weight gain, poor diet quality, tooth decay, and increased risk of diabetes and heart disease. Oftentimes, the sugary food crowds out more healthy foods that kids need making them overfed and undernourished.

Although there's been considerable improvement in the nutritional quality of school meals since the [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act](#), levels of added sugars documented in this study are cause for concern. **While child nutrition advocates push the USDA to incorporate sugar limits, schools need not wait on politics to address concerns about added sugars and can work with parents, food service, and students to review menus and develop policies to limit high-sugar options by exploring alternative in-house prepared items, locally sourced whole food items, and newer formulations of manufactured products with less sugar.**