
SPECIAL DIETS AND ETHICAL BELIEFS IN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

1. General principles for planning special diets and the notification procedure in school and student catering services

1.1. Diets and notifying staff

Special diets, diets based on ethical beliefs and their general principles and availability are set out in the catering services' service description.

Students with special dietary needs are served diets and meals based on the general special diet guidelines. Special diets are diets intended for the treatment of a certain illness. They need to adhere to the general nutrition recommendations, unless the diet requires deviating from the recommendations. The appearance of the meals should be as close to the general diet as possible. As a rule, basic and vegetarian menus, as well as their product selections, are always the primary option.

Catering staff can only provide special diets correctly and safely when they are given precise information on the students' diets.

In order for a student to receive special diet meals, the need for the special diet must be diagnosed by a doctor and the student must provide the school/educational institution with a medical certificate (or a statement by a healthcare professional) on the matter.

For a child starting school, the medical certificate should not be more than one year old.

A medical certificate is not required for a vegetarian diet, vegan diet, diet based on religious grounds, low-lactose diet or in case of mild food allergies (see operating procedures under Sections 2.1, 2.4, 2.7 and 2.8).

The school/educational institution will notify the school cafeteria of the need for a special diet and of any changes using the special diet form. It will make things easier for the kitchen if the guardian/student fills out the form in Finnish (this also applies to English and Swedish language forms). If you fill out the form in another language, the school will work together with the guardian/student and the school/student healthcare to make sure that the necessary information is available in Finnish before it is submitted to the kitchen. These parties will also cooperate in other unclear situations.

The need for a special diet should be reviewed regularly, and any changes must be reported to the school (**no medical certificate required**). Any dietary changes must be communicated on a new special diet form. If there are no dietary changes,

you need not submit a new form, but the school cafeteria will follow the information on your previous form.

If the need for a special diet is based on religious or ethical beliefs, the school/educational institution is also notified of the matter using the special diet form. In case of special diets based on ethical and religious beliefs, the basic principle is that students follow the special diet they have requested.

However, school meals do not necessarily include all of the ingredients required by or suitable for various allergies or other special diets. As a rule, special meals are planned based on basic and vegetarian menus and a selection of special dishes. Meals for students requiring a special diet are planned to be as varied and balanced as possible, while taking into account the special characteristics of the diet as well as suitable dishes and ingredients.

Special diet dishes are prepared from ingredients that are suitable to a Finnish diet. Special ingredients are usually not used for preparing main courses or side dishes.

1.2. Meal compensation

If a student is unable to eat school meals or dishes designed to replace them for health-related reasons, school meals can be compensated to the student's guardian under a special decision issued by the Education Division. The meal compensation matter is prepared by the Education Division's Food Services Specialist based on statements from the service provider and the student's guardian. The compensation is granted by the Head of the Education Division. The meal compensation procedure is described in further detail in a separate instruction.

1.3. Codes for special diets

The service provider is responsible for ensuring that the suitability of all dishes is marked on the menus and the meal options on a daily basis.

The following special diets are marked on the menu available in the school cafeteria and the meal options are marked with the following codes based on their suitability:

Gluten-free	G
Dairy-free	M
Lactose-free	L
Low-lactose	VL
Vegan	VEG

In addition, the following codes are used to indicate which dishes on the menu are suitable for beef-free and pork-free diets:

Pork-free	S
Beef-free	N

2. Special diets and ethical beliefs and their descriptions

2.1. Lactose intolerance

Lactose intolerance is caused by the lack of the lactase enzyme and the resulting malabsorption of lactose (i.e. milk sugar). Normally, 2–3 g of lactose cause no symptoms. The diet is a **low-lactose diet**. No medical certificate is required for this a low-lactose diet.

Products that contain lactose are replaced with low-lactose alternatives. Products available at school lunch may not have been prepared from so-called low-lactose ingredients. The amount of lactose contained in a product determines whether it is considered low-lactose or not. Low-lactose products contain = or < 1 g / 100 g of finished product.

Beverages offered to students with low-lactose diet include low-lactose milk, lactose-free milk drink or low-lactose/lactose-free sour milk (or water if the student prefers it).

2.2. Lactase enzyme deficiency

Congenital lactase deficiency is an extremely rare gastrointestinal disorder diagnosed in newborn infants and examined in special health care. It requires a completely lactose-free diet, for which a medical certificate is needed. In this diet, milk products containing lactose will be replaced with lactose-free products. Beverages available to students with lactose-free diet include lactose-free milk drink or sour milk (or water if the student prefers it).

2.3. Coeliac disease

Persons who suffer from coeliac disease (affecting the stomach) or dermatitis herpetiformis (coeliac skin conditions) follow a coeliac diet. The condition is treated with a strict and life-long **gluten-free diet**.

Wheat, rye and barley contain gluten and are thus eliminated from the diet, as are any food products that have been manufactured using these grains. Full grain semolina, couscous, bulgur, durum, spelt, triticale and semolina are also not allowed. Regular wheat starch or barley starch (Ohrakas) may not be used as an ingredient.

Prohibited grain products are replaced with gluten-free grains, such as rice, corn, buckwheat and millet, as well as potato and corn starch and flour mixtures made of them, and other gluten-free products. Coeliac diet may include gluten-free oats, industrially filtered gluten-free wheat starch and regular products with an analysed gluten content of less than 20 mg/kg (EU decree). Ordinary soy sauce is suitable for those suffering from coeliac disease as the wheat gluten ingredient used in it is fully disintegrated during the production process (Finnish Coeliac Society experts). **If**

your child's diet may not include gluten-free oats or gluten-free wheat starch, please note this on the special diet form.

Soft gluten-free bread is available for students following a coeliac diet in accordance with the basic menu.

2.4. Food allergies

Food allergy with severe allergic symptoms or allergy to a vital ingredient: milk, egg, wheat, fish and nuts are the most common causes of severe allergic reactions. Nutritionally vital ingredients are replaced with other ingredients suitable for the student. The diet is based on a diagnosis carried out by a doctor and a medical certificate. **A medical certificate is required for all foods that cause severe allergic reactions**, even if they are not to be replaced with other foods. If the student's diet is particularly restricted, an individual diet plan should also be attached to the special diet form.

The suitability codes used in menus are based on the product information of the ingredients used in the dishes and do not take into account manufacturers' 'may contain traces of' labelling.

Please state on the special diet form whether the student may be served ingredients with 'may contain traces of' labelling.

If ingredients labelled as 'may contain' are not allowed, they will not be used in any form. If ingredients labelled as 'may contain' are allowed, they may be served to the student.

In case of life-threatening allergies, it can be separately agreed that the student will pick up a tray labelled with the student's name from the kitchen staff to ensure safety. When picking up the tray, the student will go over the content of the dishes on the tray together with the kitchen staff. The school must be informed if the student carries an epinephrine auto-injector and instructed on how the student is to be treated in case of an accidental ingestion of a prohibited food item.

Food allergies with mild, passing symptoms: If the student only experiences mild symptoms from a particular food item, the student can personally remove the food item in question from the plate. In such cases the student does not need a special diet or medical certificate. Ingredients that typically cause mild allergic symptoms that pass by themselves, such as itching of the mouth and hives, include uncooked vegetables (tomato, carrot, apple) and fruit, especially among those allergic to pollen or suffering from atopic dermatitis. In many cases, uncooked vegetables that cause mild symptoms do not cause any symptoms at all when cooked. Allergies to additives and spices are extremely rare. Most school meals are mildly seasoned and suitable for most allergic students.

It is important for students to learn to eat a varied diet. The more food items are to be avoided in a diet, the harder it becomes to ensure it is nutritionally balanced. The extensive avoidance of vegetables, fruit and berries reduces the intake of several

vitamins and minerals and increases the risk of obesity. Current Care Guidelines: Ruoka-allergia (lapset) / potilaalle (www.kaypahoito.fi). Lasten ruoka-allergia -opas (www.allergia.fi)

2.4.1. Dairy-free diet

Milk protein can cause an allergic reaction.

A dairy-free diet may not include any form of milk or dairy products or their ingredients.

Plant milks are served as beverages at school meals (or water if the student prefers it).

2.4.2. Grain allergy

Grain allergy is not the same condition as coeliac disease. In case of a grain allergy, the grain causing an allergic reaction must be avoided altogether.

Suitable bread products replacing the school's basic bread selection are served to students suffering from grain allergies.

2.5. Diabetic diet

Diabetic students are served the same dishes as the other students. If necessary, the guardian must submit to the school a personal meal plan for a diabetic student.

The need to have a snack depends on the length of the school day, whether or not the student has had physical education lessons that day and how the student's diabetes is being treated. Snacks served include products in the school's basic selection, such as bread, margarine, vegetable slices and milk. Cheese, cold cuts, fruit and yoghurt are also served based on their availability on the school menu. The student will pick up the snack from the school cafeteria. The schedule and other practical arrangements will be settled with the school and the catering service.

Ensuring that diabetic students have successful school meals requires cooperation between various parties. Particularly if the student has only recently been diagnosed, is just starting school or transferring schools, it is a good idea to arrange a meeting at school. The meeting should be attended by a guardian/student as well as a representative from the school and the catering service.

Together, the parties should agree on matters such as who is responsible for portioning or checking the student's meals and snacks (student, catering service employee, teacher, special needs assistant). Another matter to be settled at the meeting is where the juice intended for treating low blood glucose level will be kept.

2.6. Diet experiments

With the exception of eliminating certain food items, diet experiments are not to be conducted at school meals. Any changes to a student's diet should be

communicated to the school as soon as possible, and the information will then be passed on to the school cafeteria.

2.7. Vegetarian and vegan diets

The dishes served at school cafeterias always include a vegetarian option.

Students may freely choose between the basic and vegetarian option.

Schools also hold a vegetarian day at least once a week (with two vegetarian main courses served).

Rotating basic and vegetarian menus with a six week cycle are planned for the schools and confirmed by the Education Division.

The vegetarian option served at schools is suitable to a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet. This diet consists of dishes that do not include meat, fish, liver or blood or any products containing them. The dishes may include dairy products and eggs. Some of the products on the vegetarian menu do not contain any dairy products and/or eggs (vegan).

A vegan diet does not contain any ingredients of animal origin. Vegan school meals are based on suitable options from the vegetarian menu, complemented with suitable side dishes. The vegan diet available at school is not as extensive as the vegetarian diet as regards the variety of meal combinations and dishes. Where possible, the school cafeteria may serve the student a vegan dish that was on the menu earlier. Plant milks are served as vegan diet beverages at school meals (or water if the student prefers it).

If necessary, a student who wants to follow a vegan diet may discuss the diet and the basic principles of vegetarian and vegan diets available at Helsinki schools with the school nurse. The student should also complement his or her vegan diet with meals outside of school.

2.8. Diets based on religious beliefs

Meals for students following a diet based on religious beliefs are based on suitable products from the basic and vegetarian menus. Prohibited ingredients are usually not replaced with similar, suitable ingredients (for example, replacing pork with beef).

Basic and vegetarian menus are planned to provide a varied and diverse selection of suitable main courses and side dishes (meal combinations).

3. Special diets for members of staff

Special diets available for members of staff and their general principles are set out in the catering services' service description. As members of staff, teachers are served a vegetarian (lacto-ovo-vegetarian), vegan, lactose-free, low-lactose and gluten-free meals. Individual food allergies are taken into account where possible (e.g. fish, celery, egg, nuts, etc.). Members of staff following a coeliac diet should notify the kitchen staff if they are unable to take a meal in the school cafeteria.

For additional information, please contact:
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