



SETTING WEEKLY AND DAILY SODIUM GOALS

On February 7, 2022, USDA published the final rule, [Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium](#). This rule, based on the recommendations included in the latest [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025](#), established standards for flavored milk, whole grains, and sodium for school years 2022–23 and 2023–24. Evaluating daily weighted sodium totals and weekly averages can help balance menus and set daily sodium goals to meet the targets.



SODIUM TARGETS

The average sodium content of meals offered over the week must meet the weekly sodium target for each age/grade group.

Transitional Sodium Targets and Timelines			
Age/Grade Groups	Breakfast Sodium (mg)	Lunch Sodium (mg)	
	SYs 2022–23 & 2023–24 Target 1	SY 2022–23 Target 1	SY 2023–24 Target 1A
K–5	≤ 540	≤ 1,230	≤ 1,110
6–8	≤ 600	≤ 1,360	≤ 1,225
9–12	≤ 640	≤ 1,420	≤ 1,280

The ten percent decrease in the weekly average sodium limit for school lunch is referred to as Target 1A.

The current sodium targets explained:

- The weekly average sodium limits for school breakfast will remain at Target 1 for school years (SY) 2022–2023 and 2023–2024.
- The weekly average sodium limits for school lunch will remain at Target 1 for SY 2022–2023 and decrease by 10% with Target 1A for SY 2023–2024.

To set achievable sodium reduction goals to meet the targets, identify current **daily weighted sodium totals** and **weekly averages** for breakfast and lunch. A **weighted sodium analysis** considers the number of students that select each menu item when calculating sodium totals for each daily menu.

Refer to ICN's [Weighted Nutrient Analysis of Sodium](#) worksheet for more information on how to make those calculations. The worksheet walks through an example of how to calculate the weighted sodium total for each daily menu included in the analysis and how to average the weighted sodium total for the week.

USDA's [Nutrient Analysis Protocols: How to Analyze Menus for USDA's School Meals Programs \(NAP Manual\)](#) provides technical guidance on calculating accurate nutrient analyses of school menus using software.

DAILY WEIGHTED SODIUM TOTALS AND WEEKLY AVERAGES ACTIVITY

Using a USDA-approved nutrient analysis program or a spreadsheet, calculate and record the daily weighted sodium totals and weekly averages for four consecutive weeks of your lunch menus in the **Daily Weighted Sodium Totals and Weekly Averages Table** below. Then, calculate and record the difference between the weekly averages and your age/grade group's target in the "Over/Under (+/-)" column.



Step 1

Calculate the **weighted sodium total** for each lunch menu included in the weekly analysis.

Daily Weighted Sodium Totals and Weekly Averages Table

Week	Monday Sodium (mg)	Tuesday Sodium (mg)	Wednesday Sodium (mg)	Thursday Sodium (mg)	Friday Sodium (mg)	Weekly Sodium Average (mg)	Sodium Target (mg)	Over/Under (+/-)
*Example	1,360	1,200	1,155	1,305	1,185	1,241	≤ 1,230	+11
*The provided example shows the daily weighted sodium totals and the weekly average for a K-5 elementary school lunch program. They compared their weekly sodium average to Target 1.								
1								
2								
3								
4								

Step 2

Calculate the **weekly sodium average (mg)**.

Example:

$$1,360 \text{ mg} + 1,200 \text{ mg} + 1,155 \text{ mg} + 1,305 \text{ mg} + 1,185 \text{ mg} = 6,205 \text{ mg}$$

$$6,205 \text{ mg} \div 5 \text{ days} = 1,241 \text{ mg}$$

Step 3

Calculate the difference between the **weekly sodium average** and the **sodium target**.

Example:

$$1,241 \text{ mg} - 1,230 \text{ mg} = 11 \text{ mg}$$

This menu's weekly sodium average is 11 mg above the weekly limit.

WEEKLY AND DAILY SODIUM GOALS

Now that you know your weekly sodium averages, you can set weekly and daily sodium goals.

WEEKLY AVERAGE SODIUM GOALS

Your weekly average sodium goal is pre-determined by the sodium target (e.g., Target 1, Target 1A). Upon calculating your weekly averages and comparing them to the sodium target, identify which, if any, are above the target. You will need to evaluate the daily sodium totals for any weeks above the target.

DAILY SODIUM TOTAL GOALS

For any week you identified as above the target, you need to look closely at its daily sodium totals. How many daily menus in that week are **at or below the target**? How many daily menus in that week are **above the target**?

In the example below, the weekly sodium average is 11 mg above the target. Upon evaluating the daily weighted sodium totals for this week, we can see that both Monday's and Thursday's menus are above the weekly sodium target.

Daily Weighted Sodium Totals and Weekly Averages Table								
Week	Monday Sodium (mg)	Tuesday Sodium (mg)	Wednesday Sodium (mg)	Thursday Sodium (mg)	Friday Sodium (mg)	Weekly Sodium Average (mg)	Sodium Target (mg)	Over/Under (+ / -)
*	1,360	1,200	1,155	1,305	1,185	1,241	≤ 1,230	+11

**The provided example shows the daily weighted sodium totals and the weekly average for a K–5 elementary school lunch program. They compared their weekly sodium average to Target 1.*

To reach your sodium reduction goals for **above the target** daily menus, carefully evaluate the sodium content of the menu items, especially entrées and condiments.

- Are there lower-sodium products you could substitute for current products?
 - Use sodium nutrient claims (e.g., Low Sodium, Reduced Sodium) to quickly identify food products that may offer lower-sodium versions of the food products you currently use.
 - Compare Nutrition Facts labels of similar products among the same brand and between different brands to find the lowest-sodium version.
- Are all of the condiments offered with each menu necessary?
 - Limit condiment packets or self-service of condiments and creating your own lower-sodium versions in-house.
 - To season or flavor food, use fresh or dried herbs and spices or salt-free seasoning mixes, chopped aromatic vegetables (e.g., garlic, ginger, carrots, celery, onions, peppers), or lemon or lime juice.
- Would using more fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats reduce the sodium content of your menu?
 - Most fresh, frozen, and canned fruit is naturally sodium-free or very low in sodium.
 - Fresh or frozen vegetables are naturally low in sodium. Only choose canned vegetables or canned beans labeled Low Sodium or No Salt Added.
 - Fresh meat is the lowest-sodium variety of meat; avoid meat injected with or packaged in a saline or sodium solution.



- Have you considered replacing any heat-and-serve entrees with a scratch or speed-scratch recipe?
 - Scratch and speed-scratch food preparation provides more control over the ingredients you choose to use in a recipe. This, in turn, allows you to better manage the nutritional content (including sodium) of your menu items.

Refer to ICN’s *Scoping Out Sodium in School Menus, Sodium Swaps: Utilizing Product Substitution, Principles of Speed-Scratch Food Preparation, Strategies, Tips, and Tricks to Reduce Sodium and Increase Flavor*, and *Mindfully Seasoning Your Menus* worksheets located on the [Shaking It Up!](#) website for additional ideas of how to reduce your daily menu sodium totals.

FOOD PRODUCT SODIUM GOALS

In addition to balancing your weekly menus and evaluating daily menu sodium totals to help you stay below the weekly sodium target, consider setting food product sodium goals. In 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released [Guidance for Industry: Voluntary Sodium Reduction Goals](#) to spur the food industry to reduce sodium and make more no-salt-added, low-sodium, and reduced-sodium products available. You are encouraged to evaluate the sodium content, unit price, and meal contribution of each product that makes up your menu and recipes and compare it to potential new lower-sodium products each procurement cycle.

The goal for each food product that makes up your menu is to reduce the sodium to be able to easily plan menus within the regulations. When you are ready to procure lower-sodium products, you must include sodium nutrition standards within your product specifications.

Learn more about procuring lower-sodium products and how to write nutrition standards that limit sodium in ICN’s [Working With Your Procurement Partners](#) and [Writing Product Specifications That Limit Sodium](#) worksheets.

FOOD PRODUCT SODIUM REDUCTION GOAL EXAMPLE

Year 1

ABC Ranch Dressing
370 mg sodium/serving



Year 2

XYZ Ranch Dressing
280 mg sodium/serving



Year 3

Scratch-made Ranch Dressing
180 mg sodium/serving



Identify your current daily weighted sodium totals and weekly averages to set achievable sodium reduction goals to meet the targets.

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