

Meal subsidy criteria

This overview summarises the main points that should be observed when planning and serving meals under the meal subsidy scheme. Student restaurants can use it as a daily reference to ensure that the serving of meals and the information displayed on the menu comply with the guidelines. The criteria are based on the meal guidelines for higher education students (published on 13 October 2021).

Meals that comply with the guidelines

Number of guideline-compliant menu options

- At least 1 if there are 2 menu options altogether
- At least 2 if there are 3-4 menu options altogether
- At least 3 if there are 5 or more menu options altogether.

Menu rotation of guideline-compliant main dishes

- At least 4 weeks.
- A guideline-compliant fish option must be offered at least twice a week and at least one of these options must be available at the basic price.

Criteria for the main dish and side dishes (see tables 1 and 2)

Other meal components (see table 3 for more detailed criteria)

In addition to the main dish, the following should be made available to students daily:

- At least one bread option (high fibre, low salt)
- A spread complying with the guidelines (vegetable oil based margarine with a fat content preferably of at least 60%).
- Water and skimmed milk/milk drink or buttermilk with added vitamin D to ensure adequate intake of vitamin D. Liquid dairy products may be replaced with plant-based drinks where necessary, such as soy or oat milk with added calcium, vitamins B₁₂ and D, and iodine.
- Fresh vegetables and/or a green salad, berries or fruits.
- Vegetable oil-based dressing or oil, to be served separately.

The following recommendations apply to all meal components (tables 1-4):

- All products branded with a heart-shaped Sydänmerkki indicating that the product is a heart-friendly option (such as bread, spreads, dressings, vegetable oils and ready meals) are recommended meal components even if they contain more salt or fat than required by the criteria.
- Iodised salt is recommended for food preparation.
- Iodised salt should be preferred also when selecting breads and other food products.
- The amount of salt is calculated based on the total sodium content of each meal component (by multiplying it with 2.5), which will show the amount of both added and natural sodium.
- A meal must contain at least 20 g of protein (particular attention should be paid to vegan meals).

Additional instructions: Meal guidelines for higher education students (sections 4.2 and 4.3, pp. 57–59)

Table 1. Main dishes

Type of main dish	Nutrient content per 100 g, maximum		
	Fat, g	Saturated fat, g	Salt, g
Porridge served as a main dish* Flakes etc. should contain at least 6 g of fibre per 100 g	3	1	0.5
Soups*	3 (5)**	1 (1.5)	0.5***–0.7
Casseroles, risottos, pasta, meal-sized salads****, pizza	5 (7)	2 (2)	0.6***–0.75
Sauce or gravy served as a main dish (such as vegetable curry, bolognese sauce)	9 (11)**	3.5 (3.5)	0.9
Pre-sliced or portioned foods with or without a sauce	8 (12)**	3 (3.5)	0.9
Sandwiches/stuffed baguettes/hamburgers or other bread-based meals The bread should have a fibre content of at least 6%	8 (12)**	3 (3.5)	0.75

* If toppings (such as slices of meat or cheese) are also offered when bread is served together with a soup or porridge, the criteria for the heart-friendly Sydänmerkki apply.

** The figures for fat displayed in brackets apply to fish options. A higher fat content is possible if the fish is the only source of fats (such as baked salmon).

*** The lower end of the range is the long-term objective for salt content.

**** A meal-sized salad must contain at least 150 g of vegetables per portion, potatoes do not count.

Table 2. Potato- and grain-based sides for the main dish

Type of side dish	Nutrient content per 100 g			
	Fat, g	Saturated fat, g	Salt, g	Fibre (of dry weight), g
Pasta	–*	Maximum 0.7	Maximum 0.3	Minimum 6
Pearled barley, other grains/grain mixed with vegetables, etc.	–	Maximum 0.7	Maximum 0.3	Minimum 6
Whole-grain rice, rice mixed with vegetables	–	Maximum 0.7	Maximum 0.3	Minimum 3
Boiled potatoes	No added fat	–	No added salt	–
Other potato sides (such as mashed potatoes, potato wedges, potatoes mixed with vegetables)	–	Maximum 0.7	Maximum 0.3**–0.5	–

* (–) No criteria apply.

** The lower end of the range is the long-term objective for salt content.

Table 3. Other meal components

Meal component	Nutrient content per 100 g			
	Fat %	Saturated fat %	Salt, g	Fibre, g
Bread	-	-	Fresh bread up to 0.7 Crispbread up to 1.2	Minimum 6 Minimum 10
Spread made with vegetable fats	Minimum 60	Maximum 30	Maximum 1.0	-
Milk or buttermilk Plant-based drinks	Maximum 0.5 Maximum 2	- **	-	-
Vegetable side • raw vegetables	-	Up to 20 in marinade	No added salt	-
Vegetable side • cooked vegetables	-	Up to 20* in marinade	Maximum 0.3	-
Salad dressing	Preferably 25 or more	Maximum 20	Maximum 1.0	-
Oil		Maximum 20		

* Any fats that meet the criteria of the heart-friendly Sydänmerkki (such as oil, margarine or a liquid vegetable fat-based preparation) can also be used when cooking the vegetables.

** Plant-based drinks: maximum 2% fat, maximum 0.4% saturated fat and maximum 5% sugar.

Table 4. Nutrition criteria-compliant salad bar

Component in a meal-sized salad	Minimum no. of components* available that meet nutrition criteria	Criteria
Raw vegetables and fruits	2	No added salt or fat
Raw or cooked vegetables	1	Raw: no added salt, maximum 20% hard fat in marinade Cooked: maximum 0.3% salt, maximum 20% hard fat in marinade
Protein component (vegetable-based, fish, eggs, cheese, meat)	1	A product that meets the criteria for the heart-friendly Sydänmerkki. Check the product-specific criteria, such as criteria that apply to pre-sliced or portioned main dish options or foodstuffs: • hard cheese: maximum 17% fat, maximum 1.2% salt • ham: maximum 4% fat, maximum 2.0% salt • smoked fish: maximum 1.38% salt • pan-fried chicken: maximum 8% fat, maximum 3% saturated fat and maximum 0.9% salt.
Oil-based salad dressing	1	Maximum 20% hard fat, maximum 1% salt

* Salad bar components that meet the nutrition criteria must be labelled for customers. Bread, spread(s) and a choice of drinks that meet the nutrition criteria must be made available to customers in addition to the meal-sized salad.

The following must be displayed at the restaurant

- Menu with prices.
- Text indicating that the meal prices are subsidised by Kela and the amount of the subsidy.
- Notice stating that customers can buy a meal at the subsidised price by showing a valid student card that entitles them to the meal subsidy or a meal subsidy card issued by Kela at the cash register. A more detailed list of the cards is available on Kela's website: <https://www.kela.fi/meal-subsidy>. This information can also be conveyed to customers by displaying sample images of the cards that entitle their holders to a meal subsidy.
- Guideline-compliant main dish options must be marked on the menu (for example with a symbol or additional text whose purpose is indicated to the customers).
- Guideline-compliant dishes must be flagged as such at the service counter (or the menu must be placed close enough to the service counter to allow customers to see which dishes comply with the guidelines).
- Guideline-compliant bread(s) and spreads must be flagged as such at the bread counter.
- Guideline-compliant milk/buttermilk and plant-based drinks must be flagged as such at the service counter (if the packaging features the heart-shaped Sydänmerkki, no other indication is needed).
- Guideline-compliant salad dressings must be flagged as such if there are also non-compliant options.

Additional instructions: Meal guidelines for higher education students (section 3.2, pp. 37–40)

A model meal must be displayed at the restaurant

- A model meal is a full meal that conforms to the plate model for a balanced meal. The model must show the components of the meal and their relative proportions.
- The model meal can be displayed in the form of an image or written instructions. The most important factor is to ensure that customers can use the model meal as a template for a meal that conforms to the plate model for a balanced meal.

Additional instructions: Meal guidelines for higher education students (section 4.3, pp. 60–61)



Image of a model meal

Price criteria for basic lunches and special meals

The maximum price of a student meal is the maximum price established in the government decree minus the meal subsidy. A special meal option can be offered if there are at least two options available at the basic price. Special meal means a meal that is made from more expensive ingredients than a student meal offered at the basic price.

Basic-price student meals include, for example:

- dishes that contain ground meat, chicken or sausage, casseroles, rich soups and salads (such as a feta salad)
- stuffed baguettes, wraps, paninis, standard pizzas and filling quiches
- vegetarian dishes made with less expensive ingredients (such as peas, beans, lentils, soy-based products or tofu)
- most pasta dishes and sauces or gravy with whole meat
- less expensive fish dishes.

More expensive special meals include, for example:

- pieces of whole meat, cutlets and portions of fish
- wok dishes made with pieces of whole meat and more expensive vegetables
- a larger, more expensive piece of whole meat (as opposed to a regular ground meat patty)
- plant-based products made with broad beans, oat, wheat gluten or mushroom protein or other such vegetable protein-based products if their price corresponds to the price per kilo of a cut of meat or fish and if the amount used is the same as in fish or meat options offered at the price of a special dish.

Ensuring the nutritional quality of meals

- To enable the monitoring of the implementation of nutritional quality criteria, the kitchen must have descriptions available of how the implementation of nutritional quality criteria can be ensured. The nutritional quality of meals can be ensured for example by the following means:
 - menu planning and standard recipes for guideline-compliant meals that have been developed or customised to suit production and the customer base
 - information on the nutrient content per 100 g of meals that comply with the meal guidelines for higher education students (cf. minimum nutritional quality requirements)
- The nutritional quality of a student meal can be roughly assessed with the help of a quality assessment tool for assessing the nutritional quality of a student meal

More instructions: Meal guidelines for higher education students (section 3.3, p. 43 and section 5.2, pp. 71–72)

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