



UPDATES TO KIDS LIVEWELL

**WHITE PAPER:
THE EVOLUTION OF
KIDS LIVEWELL
NUTRITION CRITERIA**

Updated October 2026



ABOUT KIDS LIVEWELL

The National Restaurant Association launched the Kids LiveWell (KLW) program in 2011 to help families identify better-for-you menu options for children when dining out. Participating restaurants commit to offering balanced meals and side dishes that emphasize fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and dairy while limiting saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium. KLW is a free, voluntary program open to any restaurant in the United States.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This White Paper provides an overview of the updated KLW nutrition criteria and the evidence-based considerations that informed their development. The National Restaurant Association modernized the KLW criteria in 2019 with minor adjustments to the beverage policy in 2026. This White Paper explains how the program evolved from 2011 (KLW version 1.0) to 2019 (KLW version 2.0) to adopt the best nutrition science, federal guidance, and consumer expectations while supporting restaurants in offering balanced menu options for children. For example, KLW version 2.0 (2019) better aligns with the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Nutrition Facts Panel](#), reduces total meal calories by 50 kilocalories, and cuts sodium by 70 milligrams for approved meals, when compared to KLW version 1.0 (2011).

KLW — BETTER FOR YOU MENU OPTIONS



NUTRITION CRITERIA UPDATES

When analyzing how to bring the K LW program into the present, the Association and Food Directions staff reviewed and weighed various options. Ultimately, staff decided to maintain a similar approach that includes both food-based requirements and nutrient thresholds.

The updated K LW 2.0 criteria are currently based on the [Children's Food & Beverage Advertising Initiative](#) (CFBAI), Category-Specific Uniform Nutrition Criteria, 2nd ed., a BBB® National Programs program. Certain of K LW's criteria were modified from CFBAI's Uniform Nutrition Criteria, to align with diverse restaurant service models (e.g., full service, fast casual), including maximum number of calories per meal, the default beverage policy, and the number of meals and sides required to participate in K LW.

K LW — REINVIGORATE, REFRESH, RECOMMIT



KEY CHANGES TO THE KLW CRITERIA IN 2019

- **REMOVING CALORIES FROM TOTAL FAT CRITERIA:** KLW 2.0 omits the total fat criterion because expert groups, eventually including the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans concluded that limiting saturated fat and trans fat intake is more important for positively impacting health.
- **ELIMINATING ALL ARTIFICIAL TRANS FATS:** Under KLW 2.0, industrially produced trans fat in KLW meals is no longer allowed, thus removing the need for a trans fat threshold. This reduction from 0.5 g of trans fat in 2011 to **0.0 g of trans fat** in 2019, reflects FDA's determination. Naturally occurring trans fats are excluded.
- **REPLACING TOTAL SUGARS CRITERION WITH AN ADDED SUGARS ONE:** KLW 2.0 shifts sugar from a **maximum** of 35% calories from total sugar criterion (2011) to a **maximum of 15 g added sugar for meals** and **5 g added sugar for side dishes**. This shift to an added sugars standard better aligns with the [Nutrition Facts Label](#), which set an added sugars Daily Value (DV) of 50 g. Setting the limit to 15 g is approximately 1/3 of the added sugar DV for meals, while 5 g is about 10% of the DV for side dishes.
- **REDUCING SODIUM THRESHOLD:** KLW 2.0 reduces the sodium threshold—for both meals and sides—from 770 mg to **700 mg for meals** and from 250 mg to **225 mg for sides**. This change seeks to reduce sodium by 10% in response to recommendations, which suggest limiting sodium.
- **CALCULATION AND ROUNDING METHODOLOGY:** Percentage-based criteria are calculated as whole numbers using floor rounding (i.e., rounded down to the nearest whole percent). Compliance is assessed based on the reported whole-number percentage. Amount-based criteria are calculated and assessed for compliance using FDA rounding rules.

RECENT CRITERIA UPDATE

- **CHANGING THE TYPE OF DAIRY PRODUCTS ALLOWED:** In 2025, whole milk and reduced-fat (2%) milk are added as an allowable default beverage options to reflect current federal policy.



OTHER UPDATES TO THE KIW PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- **NUMBER OF MEALS:** We have moved from one meal and two sides to an increase of two meals and maintenance of two sides.
- **DEFAULT BEVERAGES:** KIW 2.0 includes a requirement for a default beverage policy for kids menus. This includes:
 - **WATER:** Water, sparkling water or flavored water, with no added natural or artificial sweeteners; and/or
 - **MILK:** Flavored or unflavored nonfat, low-fat (1%), reduced-fat (2%), or whole dairy milk or non-dairy beverage that is nutritionally equivalent to fluid milk (e.g., soy milk) in a serving size of 8 oz. or less; and/or
 - **JUICE:** 100% fruit or vegetable juice, or fruit and/or vegetable juice combined with water or carbonated water, with no added natural or artificial sweeteners, in a serving size of 8 oz. or less.
 - **OTHER BEVERAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.**
- **FRIED FOODS:** Fried foods are no longer prohibited as menu items, but they are not encouraged. If included, **they must meet** all nutrition criteria.



HEALTHY MEALS,
HAPPY KIDS



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN KIDS LIVEWELL

1.

PROVIDE AT LEAST 2 CHILDREN'S MEALS THAT MEET KIDS LIVEWELL CRITERIA.

KLW requires participating restaurants to offer at least 2 children's meals that meet the following criteria:*

- **CALORIES:** ≤550
- **CALORIES FROM SATURATED FAT:** ≤10%**
- **TRANS FAT:** 0 g
- **ADDED SUGARS:** ≤15 g
- **SODIUM:** ≤700 mg
- **FOOD GROUPS:** KLW meals must include servings in the specified amounts from **at least 2 of the following 5 food groups. At least 1 of the 2 food groups must be a fruit or vegetable.**

- **Fruit:** ≥1/2 c (cup) (includes 100% juice)
- **Vegetable:** ≥1/2 c
- **Dairy:** ≥1 c; 1/2 c yogurt
- **Meat or meat alternative:** Includes meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, pulses (beans, peas, lentils), soy products, and nuts and seeds: ≥1 oz. Examples of 1-oz. equivalents: 1 oz. of meat, poultry or seafood; 1 egg; 1/4 c of cooked beans or tofu; 2 Tbsp peanut butter; or 1 oz. of nuts or seeds.
- **Whole grains:** 1/2 serving
To provide a half-serving of whole grains, a food must provide ≥8 g of whole grains and meet at least one of the following: 1) First ingredient a whole grain; 2) ≥50% whole grains by weight of product; or 3) 50% whole grains by weight of grains.

2.

PROVIDE AT LEAST 2 SIDE DISHES THAT MEET KIDS LIVEWELL CRITERIA.

Restaurants participating in KLW must offer at least 2 side dishes for children that meet the following nutrition criteria:

- **CALORIES:** ≤200
- **CALORIES FROM SATURATED FAT:** ≤10%**
- **TRANS FAT:** 0 g
- **ADDED SUGARS:** ≤5 g
- **SODIUM:** ≤225 mg
- **FOOD GROUPS:** KLW side dishes must include at least **1 serving from the following 5 food groups:**

- **Fruit:** ≥1/2 c (cup) (includes 100% juice)
- **Vegetable:** ≥1/2 c
- **Dairy:** ≥1 c; 1/2 c yogurt
- **Meat or meat alternative:** Includes meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, pulses (beans, peas, lentils), soy products, and nuts and seeds: ≥1 oz. Examples of 1-oz. equivalents: 1 oz. of meat, poultry or seafood; 1 egg; 1/4 c of cooked beans or tofu; 2 Tbsp peanut butter; or 1 oz. of nuts or seeds.
- **Whole grains:** 1/2 serving
To provide a half-serving of whole grains, a food must provide ≥8 g of whole grains and meet at least one of the following: 1) First ingredient a whole grain; 2) ≥50% whole grains by weight of product; or 3) 50% whole grains by weight of grains.



** = Saturated fat naturally occurring in nutrient-dense dairy products and whole plant foods (e.g., nuts, seeds, avocado) is not the primary target of this criterion. Therefore, inherent saturated fat from these items is excluded when calculating the % calories from saturated fat for KLW side items with limited ingredients.

3.

ADHERE TO THE K LW'S "DEFAULT BEVERAGE" POLICY.

If you include or offer beverages as part of the kids' meals at your restaurant, the K LW program requires participating restaurants to ensure that the **"default beverages" you make available for any of your children's meals meet certain criteria.**

A default beverage refers to the beverage or beverages automatically included with a children's meal. Customers may request a different beverage if they choose.

Restaurants participating in K LW must offer one or more K LW-approved beverages as the default option for children's meals.

APPROVED BEVERAGES

- **WATER:** water, sparkling water, or flavored water, with no added natural or artificial sweeteners; and/or
- **MILK:** flavored or unflavored nonfat, low-fat (1%), reduced-fat (2%), or whole dairy milk or non-dairy beverage that is nutritionally equivalent to fluid milk (i.e., soy milk, almond milk) in a serving size of 8 oz. or less; and/or
- **JUICE:** 100% fruit or vegetable juice, or fruit and/or vegetable juice combined with water or carbonated water, with no added natural or artificial sweeteners, in a serving size of 8 oz. or less.

Default beverage options should be displayed anywhere customers order or view children's meals, including menus, menu boards, websites, mobile apps, drive-thru displays, takeout materials, and in-store signage. See the Kids LiveWell Guide to Beverages document for more details.



4.

PROVIDE VALIDATION FOR THE NUTRITION CONTENT OF YOUR MENU ITEMS.

- **Third-party validation:** Nutrition information for all Kids LiveWell meals and side dishes must be verified. Contact KidsLiveWell@restaurant.org for details.

5.

MAKE NUTRITION INFORMATION ABOUT KIDS LIVEWELL ITEMS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR GUESTS.

Display or make available on request the nutrition profile of the K LW menu options you offer, and promote/identify these better for you menu options, whenever possible, to make it easy for families to choose.



CREATIVE

LOGOS

While not required, we recommend restaurants identify Kids LiveWell menu items in restaurants and online with the Kids LiveWell logo and/or carrot icon.

KIDS LIVEWELL LOGO:



KIDS LIVEWELL ICON:



KIDS LIVEWELL DESCRIPTION:

To explain what Kids LiveWell is all about, participating restaurants are encouraged to use the following description:

This menu item is part of the Kids LiveWell program and has been verified by the National Restaurant Association to meet specific nutrition criteria established by leading health organizations' scientific guidelines.

SOCIAL MEDIA

TAG US:

When promoting Kids LiveWell on your social media pages, tag us at [@werrestaurants](https://www.instagram.com/wearerestaurants).

HASH TAG:

When promoting Kids LiveWell use the hashtag **#KidsLiveWell**.



SAMPLE INSTAGRAM POSTS:

Consider using these graphics.





SAMPLE FACEBOOK POSTS:

Consider using these graphics:



SAMPLE X POSTS (FORMERLY KNOWN AS TWEETS ON TWITTER):

- What's Hot Survey asks chefs to predict trends + shows balanced kids meals in the top 10 since 2012. Join kidslivewell.com to tap into this trend!
- Looking for balanced menu items for children? Visit kidslivewell.com for participating restaurants.
- Seeking better-for-you options for kids? Look for the Kids LiveWell logo to identify menu items at your fave restaurants or visit kidslivewell.com.