



Frequently Asked Questions

(Revised November 2023)

WIC Authorized Food List Shopping Guide April 2, 2019

The WIC Authorized Food List Shopping Guide ([Shopping Guide](#)) is an educational tool that provides information about the foods authorized by the California Department of Public Health/Women, Infants and Children Division (CDPH/WIC).

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **What is a Food Category or Subcategory as used in the “Important WIC Authorized Food List Shopping Guide Information” section?**

In the Shopping Guide, authorized WIC foods are separated by Food Category/Subcategory with each having its own requirements.

A Food Category is a large grouping of healthy foods that includes cheese, milk, eggs, peanut butter, canned fish, whole grains, and others.

A Food Subcategory includes different types of foods in each category. For example, the food “Basmati Brown Rice” is in the Food Category “Whole Grains” and in the Subcategory “Brown Rice.”

2. **What is the difference between being “printed on the check” and “included in your WIC Food Balance?” Both phrases are used in the Shopping Guide.**

Please ignore all “printed on the check” references in the Shopping Guide. In 2020, CDPH/WIC replaced paper checks with the California WIC Card. References to paper checks will be removed when the Shopping Guide is next revised.

With the WIC Card, the WIC Food Balance lists the types and amounts of foods participants can buy with the WIC Card. Not all foods included in the Shopping Guide are available to all participants, which is why the Shopping Guide includes the language stating that foods must be included in the WIC Food Balance.

3. Do participants have to buy everything that is included in their WIC Food Balance?

No, participants are not required to buy all foods and/or the entire amounts of foods in their WIC Food Balance. For example, if the WIC Food Balance includes three gallons of milk, the participant does not have to buy all three gallons of milk, though CDPH/WIC encourages participants to make full use of their benefits.

Moreover, participants may buy foods as needed at each shopping trip. They can buy what is left at subsequent shopping trips *until the last day to use their monthly benefits*.

4. What is the meaning of “authorized food items are specific to each individual food category and subcategory” from the “Important WIC Authorized Food List Shopping Guide Information” section?

This statement means that each food category/subcategory is only available to a WIC participant when it is included in the WIC Food Balance. For example, when the WIC Food Balance includes soy, the participant may only buy foods meeting the requirements in that food’s “Can Buy” section. In this example, the participant could not buy regular cow’s milk because it is a separate food category.

5. Why might a food be listed in the paper Shopping Guide, but not be included in the WIC App or MyFamily website?

Sometimes, foods are discontinued or reformulated by their manufacturer after they are included in the paper Shopping Guide, making them no longer available for purchase with WIC benefits. In those instances, CDPH/WIC does its best to remove those foods from the WIC App and the [WIC Foods](#) section of the MyFamily website. CDPH/WIC is unable to remove those foods from the paper version of the Shopping Guide until the next time it is revised. At that time, those foods will be removed from the paper version, as applicable. CDPH/WIC encourages participants to use the WIC App to scan food barcodes to determine if a product is authorized and included in their WIC Food Balance.

BREAKFAST CEREAL

1. Can participants buy authorized cereal if the package sizes do not add up to 36 ounces (oz)?

Yes, participants can buy less than 36 oz as long as each package is 11.8–12 oz for instant oats/oatmeal or 12–36 oz for all other cereals.

2. If the packaging for an authorized cereal has changed, can participants still buy the cereal?

Yes, packaging and logo artwork, brand name, and product name changes are not important; the product itself has not changed. Therefore, CDPH/WIC continues to authorize the food for purchase. Ingredient changes may affect authorization, and CDPH/WIC will review products as needed to ensure products continue to be authorized.

3. Why can't participants buy Post Bran Flakes anymore?

Post Bran Flakes was reformulated in 2019 by its manufacturer to reduce the iron content to 25 mg per 100 g of cereal. As a result, Post Bran Flakes no longer meets the federal WIC iron requirements for breakfast cereal, making it no longer authorized for purchase with WIC benefits. Though Post Bran Flakes is still listed in the paper version of the Shopping Guide, it has been removed from both the WIC App and the WIC Foods section of the MyFamily website. CDPH/WIC encourages participants to use the WIC App to scan food barcodes to determine if a product is authorized and included in their WIC Food Balance.

CANNED FISH

1. Can participants buy more than one type of fish?

Yes, as long as it is an authorized fish type. The number of oz cannot exceed the maximum number of oz included in the WIC Food Balance. For example, a participant could purchase three 5 oz cans of canned chunk light tuna and one 14.75 oz can of canned pink salmon using their WIC Card.

2. Which kinds of mackerel can participants buy?

Canned mackerel does not always identify the type of mackerel on the label. One helpful tip is that King mackerel is not authorized. Federal requirements allow North Atlantic *Scomber scombrus*, Chub Pacific *Scomber japonicas*, and Jack mackerel. The label may not include the mackerel type, but it may be helpful to see if the label identifies the fish as one of these types. CDPH/WIC encourages participants to use the WIC App to scan food barcodes to determine if a product is authorized and included in their WIC Food Balance.

CANNED MATURE BEANS

1. What is in the Canned Mature Beans food category?

This food category authorizes plain, cooked mature beans or lentils such as black beans, kidney beans, and pinto beans in 15–16 oz cans. See the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide for more information.

2. **What are “mature” beans?**

When the seeds in the bean pod grow to their full size and maturity, the term "mature beans" is used. Examples of mature bean types include pinto beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, and navy beans. Beans such as green beans, string beans, and wax beans are not mature beans.

CHEESE

1. **What are “cheese blends?”**

When two or more types of cheese are mixed together into a block, it is considered blended or marbled. Colby-jack cheese and “cheddarella” (combo of cheddar and mozzarella) are examples of blended cheeses.

2. **How can a participant tell if a cheese is pasteurized?**

The ingredients list will include pasteurized milk, cultured pasteurized milk, or pasteurized, cultured milk as the first ingredient. If the word “pasteurized” is not included, the cheese is not pasteurized and is not authorized.

DRY BEANS, PEAS, OR LENTILS

1. **Why are dry beans, peas, or lentils sold in bulk no longer authorized?**

Dry beans, peas, or lentils sold in bulk are not authorized because the WIC Card requires a product be included in the California WIC Authorized Product List (APL). Grocery stores often use their own unique product codes to identify bulk food items. Because these product codes are not uniform, CDPH/WIC is not able to include them in its APL.

EGGS

1. **Can participants buy brown eggs?**

No. The color of the egg does not affect the nutrition content, and brown eggs are more expensive than white eggs. Authorizing less expensive types of eggs helps CDPH/WIC keep program costs down in order to serve more participants.

2. **Why do you only authorize large eggs?**

Large eggs are the most commonly available size.

3. **Can participants buy specialty eggs?**

No. Specialty eggs, like pasture-raised, organic, and DHA-enriched, are more expensive than regular white eggs. Authorizing less expensive types of eggs helps CDPH/WIC to keep program costs down in order to serve more participants.

4. **Are cage-free eggs authorized?**

Yes. Cage-free eggs are authorized as of September 1, 2021. The Shopping Guide says they are prohibited, but CDPH/WIC authorized them after the Shopping Guide was last printed due to a change in California law requiring all eggs sold in California be cage-free. This change is reflected in the WIC App and on the [MyFamily](#) website and will be included in the next revision of the paper Shopping Guide.

Specialty eggs, like pasture-raised, organic, and DHA-enriched, remain prohibited.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (CANNED FRUITS)

1. **Do participants have to buy canned fruits in cans?**

No. “Canned” refers to the process of canning or preserving, not the can itself. Participants can buy canned/preserved fruits in any type of container, including but not limited to cans, plastic, or glass. Fruits also must be packed in water or juice, without added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie), salt, fats, or oils.

2. **Can participants buy small fruit cup-type containers?**

Yes, participants can buy any size and type of container, as long as the product is not made with added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie), salt, fats, or oils.

3. **Can participants buy applesauce in glass or plastic containers?**

Yes, applesauce in any container type is authorized if it does not have added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie), salt, fats, or oils.

4. **Can participants buy blends of applesauce with other fruits such as berries?**

Yes, applesauce blends are authorized if they do not have added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie), salt, fats, or oils.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (CANNED VEGETABLES)

1. Do participants have to buy canned vegetables in cans?

No. “Canned” refers to the process of canning or preserving, not the can itself. Participants can buy canned/preserved vegetables in any type of container, including but not limited to cans, plastic, or glass. Vegetables also cannot have added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie) and added sauces, fats, or oils.

2. Can participants buy canned hominy?

Yes, canned hominy is a type of corn. Any color of hominy without added sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie) and added sauces, fats, or oil is authorized.

3. Can participants buy canned mixed vegetables containing mature beans with the Fruits and Vegetables benefit?

No, participants cannot buy canned mixed vegetables containing mature beans with this benefit. Canned mature beans are authorized for purchase with the legumes benefit only.

4. Can participants buy stewed tomatoes, tomato sauce, pizza sauce, spaghetti sauce, ketchup, salsa, and soup?

No. Federal WIC rules do not allow tomato products with added sugar, fats, or oils. All of the listed items above typically contain at least one of these ingredients.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (FROZEN FRUITS)

1. Can participants buy frozen fruit pulp?

Yes. Participants can buy fruit pulp as well as smoothie mixtures. These products cannot have added ingredients, oils, salt, or sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie).

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (FROZEN VEGETABLES)

1. Can participants buy mixtures of frozen vegetables that contain frozen mature beans such as soybeans or lima beans?

Yes. Frozen beans or frozen beans and vegetables mixtures may be bought with the Fruit and Vegetable benefit.

2. Can participants buy frozen vegetables that can be cooked in the bag?

Yes. Any container type is authorized, including “cook-in-the bag.” Products in this packaging type often include added ingredients, which are not authorized. Make sure that the frozen vegetable product selected does not contain other ingredients such as seasonings, sauces, or grains.

3. What kinds of frozen potatoes can participants buy?

Participants can buy frozen potatoes without added sauces, fats, sugars, sweeteners, or oil. French fries, tater tots, hash browns, and mashed potatoes are not authorized. They cannot be bought even if they do not contain added sauce, fats, sugars, sweeteners (artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie), or oil.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (FRESH)

1. Can participants buy white and red potatoes or yams?

Yes. Authorized products include any color of potato, yam, or sweet potato.

2. Can participants buy berries packaged in containers?

Yes, as long as they do not have any added sugar, sweeteners (artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie) oils, or fats.

3. Can participants buy onions, garlic, chilies, or jalapeños?

Yes, as long as they are not decorative, on a string, dried, or have added sauces, fats, oils, sugars, or sweeteners (artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie).

4. Can participants buy green onions?

Yes. Participants can buy green onions.

5. Can participants buy fruit roll-ups?

No. Fruit roll-ups often have added sugar, oil, or fat and are not authorized.

FRUITS (DRIED)

1. Can participants buy dried fruit with the Fruits and Vegetables benefit?

Yes. Participants older than 12 months of age can buy dried fruits with the Fruits and Vegetables benefit.

2. Are all types of dried fruits authorized?

No. Dried fruits with added fats, oils, natural or artificial flavors, or sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie) are not authorized.

3. Are dried vegetables authorized?

No. Dried vegetables are not authorized.

4. Why are dried fruits sold in bulk no longer authorized?

Dried fruits sold in bulk are not authorized because the WIC Card requires a product be included in the California WIC APL. Grocery stores often use their own unique product codes to identify bulk food items. Because these product codes are not uniform, CDPH/WIC is not able to include them in its APL.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES CASH-VALUE BENEFIT (CVB)

1. Can participants buy a mix of fruits and vegetables with their Fruits and Vegetables benefit?

Yes. Participants can buy a combination of fruits and vegetables in any combination of authorized forms (e.g., fresh, canned, frozen).

2. Must participants buy specific package sizes of fruits and vegetables items?

No. Any size can be bought. The Fruits and Vegetables benefit is issued in a maximum dollar amount, not in package size.

3. What happens if the participant's purchase price goes over the dollar amount limit for their Fruits and Vegetables benefit?

The participant can pay the extra amount using CalFresh benefits, cash, or credit. If the participant does not want to pay the extra amount, fruit and vegetable items can be put back.

4. If the purchase price is lower than the limit of the Fruits and Vegetables benefit, should the participant receive cash back?

No. The participant should not receive cash back. With the WIC Card, a participant may use the remaining balance at a later shopping trip until the last day to use their monthly benefits.

5. Is the Fruits and Vegetables benefit the only benefit where the participant can pay the money difference?

Yes. The Fruits and Vegetables benefit is the only benefit where the participants can pay the difference.

6. **Can the Fruits and Vegetables benefit be used at farmers' markets?**

The CVB included in the WIC Food Balance is accepted by some farmers at some farmers' markets. See the list of [CA WIC and Senior Authorized Farmers](#) or use the [Farmers' Market search tool](#) at MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov to find authorized farmers and markets.

INFANT FORMULA

1. **Why are infant formula product information and pictures not included in the Shopping Guide?**

Due to frequent infant formula manufacturer label and name changes, it is hard to keep formula information current in the Shopping Guide. Therefore, the information is not included in the paper Shopping Guide. Infant formula product information is included in the WIC App, which is easier to keep up to date. The information is also included in a [Contract Infant Formula Flyer](#) on CDPH/WIC's website and the [MyFamily](#) website. This flyer can be used by both vendors and participants and is to be printed for participants at the WIC clinic, upon request.

INFANT FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AND INFANT MEATS

1. **Can participants buy any brand of infant fruits and vegetables or infant meats?**

No. Participants must buy products made by the brands listed in the Shopping Guide "Can Buy" sections.

2. **Why are 3.5 oz containers of infant fruits and vegetables no longer authorized?**

This size is no longer authorized because the baby food industry no longer makes 3.5 oz containers in authorized container types. Infant fruits and vegetables in 3.5 oz pouches are not authorized.

3. **Do participants have to buy all of the infant fruits and vegetables or infant meats included in their WIC Food Balance?**

No, participants are not required to buy all foods and/or the entire amounts of foods in their WIC Food Balance, though CDPH/WIC encourages participants to make full use of their benefits. Moreover, participants may buy foods as needed at each shopping trip. They can buy what is left at subsequent shopping trips until the last day to use their monthly benefits.

4. **Are infant fruits with added fruit juice authorized?**

Yes, but products where juice is listed as the first ingredient are not authorized.

5. Can participants buy 2-packs and multi-packs?

Yes. Participants can buy any multi-pack. The number of individual containers cannot exceed the maximum included in their WIC Food Balance. For example, if the amount authorized is 32 containers, participants can buy sixteen 2-packs of 4 oz containers. 2-packs of 2 oz containers are NOT allowed.

6. Do 2-packs count as one or two containers of infant fruits and vegetables?

A 2-pack contains two individual containers packaged into one unit. Therefore, a 2-pack is counted as two containers.

INFANT CEREAL

1. Can participants buy three 8 oz boxes of infant cereal with the WIC Card?

With the WIC Card, participants can buy either three 8 oz containers or a combination of one 8 oz container and one 16 oz container.

JUICE (BOTTLED AND CONCENTRATE)

1. Why did the front label rules for bottled and concentrate juice change from 120% to 80% vitamin C (or more)?

This change became effective on February 1, 2018. It was made because the federal vitamin C Reference Daily Intake (RDI) for adults and children over 4 years of age increased. This increase made it necessary for CDPH/WIC to change the front label percentage rule for juice from 120% to 80% vitamin C (or more).

Though the requirement states 80% vitamin C (or more) is authorized, products with higher amounts of vitamin C are still WIC authorized. For example, products meeting all other WIC juice requirements with 120% or 130% vitamin C on the front label are authorized.

2. Why do the front labels for ruby red and pink grapefruit juice need to state 80% vitamin C (or more) while the front label for white grapefruit juice does not?

Federal rules require that juices contain a certain amount of vitamin C. Citrus juices, like orange juice and white grapefruit juice, naturally contain the right amount of vitamin C. So, only non-citrus juices are required to state the amount of vitamin C on the front label.

Ruby red and pink grapefruit juices are blended with non-citrus juice. Therefore, their front labels must include the 80% vitamin C (or more) statement.

3. The Shopping Guide shows that participants can buy juice blends. Can a participant buy orange-tangerine juice?

No. Participants cannot buy orange-tangerine because tangerine is not an authorized flavor. Participants can buy only juice blends that are blends of two or more authorized flavors as named on the front label. For example, cranberry-apple blend is authorized because both cranberry and apple are authorized flavors.

4. What is the difference between concentrate juice and bottled juice?

The concentrate juice food category includes both frozen and non-frozen concentrate juice. Concentrate juice must be reconstituted by adding water to it before it can be consumed. Bottled juice can be consumed right out of the bottle.

5. How do we reconstitute concentrate juice and how much juice does one container make?

Open the concentrate can of juice and pour into large container. Using the empty juice can, add three cans of water into container, mix well, and refrigerate.

- 11.5 oz concentrate juice reconstitutes to 46 oz of juice
- 12 oz concentrate juice reconstitutes to 48 oz of juice
- 16 oz concentrate juice reconstitutes to 64 oz of juice

6. How do participants make the most of their juice benefit?

To make the most of their juice benefit:

- Children can buy two 64 oz bottles or 16 oz containers of concentrate juice,
- Participants who are pregnant or are fully or mostly breastfeeding can buy three 11.5 or 12 oz containers of concentrate juice, and
- Participants who are breastfeeding a little or who are not breastfeeding can buy two 11.5 or 12 oz containers of concentrate juice.

MILK

1. Are participants required to buy store brand milk?

No. Participants can buy any brand of milk that meets the requirements in the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide and is included in the APL. If you cannot purchase a milk you believe should be authorized, please send an email to WIC@cdph.ca.gov with pictures of the product, including front label, UPC, Nutrition Facts, and ingredients list.

2. Can all participants buy whole milk?

No. Federal WIC rules allow whole milk for children 12–23 months of age. All other participants may buy lowfat (1%) or nonfat milk. The fat level approved for each participant is included in their WIC Food Balance.

3. When can a participant buy evaporated milk or powdered dry milk instead of fluid milk?

A participant must first ask for evaporated or powdered milk to be included in their WIC benefits at the clinic. Once the evaporated or powdered dry milk has been issued to the participant at the clinic, it will be included in their WIC Food Balance. The participant can then buy the evaporated or powdered dry milk that's available in their WIC Food Balance.

PEANUT BUTTER

1. Can participants buy reduced fat or lowfat peanut butter?

No. Most reduced fat or lowfat peanut butters do not meet the federal rule that authorized peanut butters must contain at least 90% peanuts. These are considered peanut butter spreads and are not authorized.

SOY

1. Was WESTSOY discontinued?

Yes. WESTSOY Organic Plus Soymilk Plain changed its name to WEST LIFE Organic Soymilk Plain with Calcium & Vitamin D and became an online only product. Because it is only available online, it is no longer available for purchase with WIC benefits.

2. Why are only specific brands of soy-based beverage authorized?

Soy-based beverage must meet specific federal WIC nutrient rules. Currently, Pacific Ultra Soy Original, 8th Continent Soymilk Original, Silk Soymilk Original, and Great Value Soymilk Original are the only products meeting these rules that are available in stores.

3. What are the fat levels of the four authorized brands of soy-based beverage in comparison to the fat levels found in cow's milk?

Authorized Soy Products' Fat Content per 8 Fluid Oz:

- Pacific Ultra Soy Original = 6 g (close to 2% cow's milk)
- 8th Continent Soymilk Original = 2.5 g (close to 1% cow's milk)

- Silk Soymilk Original = 4.5 g (close to 2% cow's milk)
- Great Value Soymilk Original = 4 g (close to 2% cow's milk)

Cow's Milk Fat Content per 8 Fluid Oz:

- Whole cow's milk = 8 g
- 2% Reduced fat cow's milk = 5 g
- 1% Lowfat cow's milk = 2 g
- Nonfat or skim cow's milk = 1 g

4. Are any of the authorized soy-based beverages organic?

No. However, Pacific Ultra Soy Original, is not 100% organic but made with organic soybeans.

5. Are any other brands of soy-based beverage authorized?

No, because other brands do not currently make and sell products in stores that meet federal WIC rules.

6. What is the difference between refrigerated and shelf-stable soy-based beverage?

Shelf-stable soy-based beverage does not require refrigeration before it is opened.

7. Why is “unsweetened soy” listed as a “Cannot Buy?”

Unsweetened soy is not authorized because none of CDPH/WIC's currently authorized brands have an unsweetened product that meets federal WIC nutrient fortification requirements for soy. If a company starts producing an unsweetened product that meets these requirements, CDPH/WIC will reconsider this “Cannot Buy.”

TOFU

1. Why are some textures of certain brands of tofu not authorized?

Some textures are not calcium-set, or they are not in a 16 oz package. Federal WIC rules require tofu be calcium-set.

WHOLE GRAINS

1. **What brands of whole wheat bread can participants buy?**

Participants can buy any brand of whole wheat bread in a 16 oz package that has “100% Whole Wheat” printed on the front label. This includes store bakery bread.

2. **Can participants buy 100% whole wheat bread with honey?**

Yes, as long as it is in a 16 oz package and “100% Whole Wheat” is printed on the front label.

3. **Can participants buy hot dog buns or hamburger buns?**

Yes, as long as they are in a 16 oz package and “100% Whole Wheat” is printed on the front label.

4. **Which brands of tortillas can participants buy?**

Participants can buy only the authorized corn or whole wheat tortilla products listed in the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide.

5. **What is the difference between the oatmeal in the breakfast cereal food category and the oatmeal in the whole grains food category?**

The oatmeal authorized in the breakfast cereal food category is individual serving packets of instant oatmeal in 11.8–12 oz containers. This oatmeal is fortified with the federally-required amount of iron. The oatmeal authorized in the whole grains food category must be in a 16 oz container and there is no required amount for iron fortification.

6. **Which brands of whole wheat pasta can participants buy?**

Participants can buy only the authorized 16 oz whole wheat pastas listed in the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide.

7. **Why are whole grains sold in bulk no longer authorized?**

Whole grains sold in bulk are not authorized because the WIC Card requires a product be included in the California WIC APL. Grocery stores often use their own unique product codes to identify bulk food items. Because these product codes are not uniform, CDPH/WIC is not able to include them in its APL.

YOGURT

1. Which brands of yogurt can participants buy?

Participants can buy only the authorized yogurt brands, types, and flavors in 32 oz (quart-sized) containers listed in the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide.

2. Can participants buy individual-serving containers of WIC authorized yogurt?

No. Only 32 oz (quart-sized) containers are authorized.

3. Is Greek yogurt authorized?

No. Only yogurt of regular texture is authorized. Greek yogurt and organic yogurt are more expensive than regular yogurt. Authorizing less expensive types of yogurt helps CDPH/WIC keep program costs down in order to serve more participants.

4. Can participants buy whole fat yogurt?

Whole fat yogurt is federally authorized for participants 12–23 months of age only. Participants 24 months of age and older must buy lowfat or nonfat yogurt. Authorized fat levels are included in the WIC Food Balance.