



# Frequently Asked Questions

## WIC Authorized Food List Shopping Guide April 2, 2019

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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/WIC Division (CDPH/WIC).

This Frequently Asked Questions answers frequently received questions from WIC participants, WIC authorized vendors, and WIC state and local agency staff about the April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide.

If your question is not below, please email [WICfoods@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:WICfoods@cdph.ca.gov) for an answer.

### 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 of these phrases are in the authorization requirements for many foods in the Shopping Guide.**

CDPH/WIC is introducing the California WIC Card. The WIC Card will replace the current paper food checks and will improve the shopping experience for WIC families and grocers. During this time, some WIC families will have paper checks while others will have the WIC Card. The April 2, 2019 Shopping Guide includes information on how to use both. For more information on when you will receive a WIC Card, ask your local WIC Office or visit the [WIC Card website](#).

Paper checks list the types, sizes, and amounts of foods to buy. If a participant wants all of the foods included on the paper check, they must buy them all at once. Paper checks cannot be partially used and saved for later

On the WIC Card, the WIC Food Balance for each participant lists the types and amounts of foods they can buy with the WIC Card. Each family receives one card for all of their family's food benefits. The WIC Card provides an easier way for families to shop for WIC foods. Participants can get just what is needed at each shopping trip. The WIC Food balance will include remaining foods available and the benefit's last day to use.

**3. Do participants have to buy everything that is printed on the check or in their WIC Food Balance?**

No, participants are not required to buy all foods and/or the entire amounts of foods printed on their checks or in their WIC Food Balance. For example, if the check or WIC Food Balance includes 3 gallons of milk, the participant does not have to buy all three gallons of milk. With the check there is no opportunity to buy what is left later. The exception, however, is infant formula—participants must buy the full quantity of infant formula printed on their WIC checks.

With the WIC Card, a participant may buy infant formula as needed at each shopping trip. You can buy what is left later until the benefit expires.

**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 when it is included on the check or in the WIC Food Balance. For example, when a check or WIC Food Balance includes the dry beans, peas, or lentils food category, the WIC participant may only buy foods meeting the requirements in that food's “Can Buy” section. In this example, participants could not buy canned beans because it is a separate food category.

## **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 12 oz or larger.

**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.

## **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 printed on the check or 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 one check or their WIC Card.

### **2. Which kinds of mackerel can participants buy?**

Canned mackerel does not always identify the type of mackerel on the label. Typically, canned mackerel is made from North Atlantic *Scomber scombrus* or Chub Pacific *Scomber scombrus* mackerel. A helpful tip is that King mackerel is not authorized. This product will always identify itself as King mackerel on the label.

## **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. When can participants buy canned mature beans?**

Canned mature beans are only provided as a benefit in food packages for participants with limited cooking facilities. If the benefit does not state that the beans are “canned,” participants cannot buy them.

### **3. 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 CDPH/WIC is moving to the WIC Card. 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. Brown eggs are more expensive than white eggs. The color of the egg does not affect the nutrition content. 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 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 all eggs in California supposed to be cage-free? If this is the case, why does CDPH/WIC not authorize cage-free eggs?**

The Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act does not require animals to be cage-free; instead, it defines size requirements for cages. Therefore, eggs authorized by CDPH/WIC are not required to be cage-free. Cage-free eggs are specialty eggs and are more expensive than regular white eggs.

## **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. Canned vegetables that require a small amount of sugar for the canning process are authorized.

**2. Can participants buy canned hominy?**

Yes, canned hominy is a type of corn. Any color of hominy 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. Only participants with limited cooking facilities are issued canned beans. These participants may only buy canned mature beans when "Canned Mature Beans" is printed on the check or included in their WIC Food Balance.

**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.

### **5. 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 jalapenos?**

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. Women and children can buy dried fruits with the Fruits and Vegetables benefit.

2. **Are any dried fruits authorized?**

No. Only dried fruits without added fats, oils, natural or artificial flavors, or sweeteners (sugar, artificial, reduced-calorie, or no-calorie) are 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 CDPH/WIC is moving to the WIC Card. 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 VOUCHER/BENEFIT (CVV/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. If a participant with paper checks does not get the full dollar amount of their Fruits and Vegetables benefit, they give up the remaining balance. With the WIC Card, a participant may use the remaining balance at a later shopping trip until the benefit's last day to use.

**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 participants combine Fruits and Vegetables checks of two family members?**

For participants using paper checks, each Fruits and Vegetables check must be used separately.

For participants using the WIC Card, the WIC Food Balance is totaled for the whole family for the month. This way, the CVB is already combined. Participants are able to use any amount of the family-combined CVB any time in that month at any number of shopping trips.

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

Yes. Fruits and Vegetables checks can be used at authorized farmers' markets. The CVB included in the WIC Food Balance will be accepted by some farmers at some farmers' markets. Lists of authorized farmers and markets can be found at [CA WIC and Senior Authorized Farmers List](#).

## **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 on the mobile website and the WIC App, which are easier to keep up to date. The information is also included in a flyer on CDPH/WIC's desktop website at [Contract Infant Formula Flyer](#). This flyer can be used by both vendors and participants and is to be printed for participants at the local agency, 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 printed on the check or included in their WIC Food Balance?**

If a participant buys fewer containers than the amount printed on the checks, they will not be able to buy the rest of the containers later.

Using the WIC Card, participants can buy fewer containers and will be able to buy their remaining balance of containers at later shopping trips. They can continue to use their remaining WIC benefits until the last day to use.

### **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 printed on the check or included in their WIC Food Balance. For example, if the amount authorized is 18 (4 oz) containers, participants can buy nine 2-packs of 4 oz containers.

### **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 2 containers.

## **INFANT CEREAL**

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

The infant cereal check says that participants must buy one 8 oz and one 16 oz package. They cannot buy three 8 oz packages.

With the WIC Card, participants are able to 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 white grapefruit juice, naturally contain the right amount of vitamin C. So, only non-citrus juices have to show 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 only buy 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,
- Women who are pregnant or are fully or mostly breastfeeding can buy three 11.5 or 12 oz containers of concentrate juice, and
- Women 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.

**2. Can all participants buy whole milk?**

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

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

When they have been issued a food package that includes evaporated or powdered dry milk. Evaporated or powdered dry milk must be printed on the check or included 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

## SOY

### 1. 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, 8<sup>th</sup> Continent Soymilk Original, Silk Soymilk Original, Great Value Soymilk Original, and WESTSOY Organic Plus Soymilk Plain are the only products that meet these rules.

### 2. What are the fat levels of the five 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 Plain = 5 g (close to 2% cow's milk)
- 8<sup>th</sup> 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)
- WESTSOY Organic Plus Soymilk Plain = 4.5 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% Low fat cow's milk = 2 g
- Nonfat or skim cow's milk = 1 g

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

Yes. WESTSOY Organic Plus Soymilk Plain is organic. Another option is Pacific Ultra Soy Original, which is not 100% organic but made with organic soybeans.

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

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

5. **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.

6. **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 rules. If a company starts producing an unsweetened product that meets these rules, 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 CDPH/WIC is moving to the WIC Card. 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 cheaper 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. Women and older children must buy lowfat or nonfat yogurt. Authorized fat levels are printed on the check or included in their WIC Food Balance.