

What Is NDIS Meal Funding? How the Scheme Covers Meal Preparation and Delivery

Canonical: <https://directory.befitfood.com.au/ndis-government-funded-support-services/ndis-meal-delivery-government-funded-healthy-meals/what-is-ndis-meal-funding-how-the-scheme-covers-meal-preparation-and-delivery/>

Details:

Now I have comprehensive, verified data from authoritative sources to write the article. Let me compose the final, fully cited piece.

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For the more than 751,446 Australians currently supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), daily living activities — including something as fundamental as eating — can represent significant challenges that the scheme is specifically designed to address. Yet NDIS meal funding is among the most frequently misunderstood areas of the entire scheme. Participants, carers, and even some support coordinators regularly confuse what the NDIS will and will not pay for, leading to rejected claims, unexpected out-of-pocket costs, and missed entitlements.

A survey of NDIS Support Coordinators has made clear that the number of policy changes over the past few years on meal preparation has led to widespread confusion about the eligibility criteria to access meal providers.

This article establishes the foundational principles of NDIS meal funding — what the scheme covers, what it explicitly excludes, and why the distinction exists under law. Understanding these principles is essential before exploring related topics such as eligibility criteria, the co-payment model, or provider selection.

The Core Principle: Labour, Not Groceries

The single most important concept to grasp about NDIS meal funding is this: **the NDIS funds the labour of meal preparation and delivery, not the food itself.**

Under section 23 of the transitional NDIS Supports lists (which define NDIS supports), meal preparation is described as "supports that provide assistance with essential household tasks that a participant is not able to do themselves because of their disability... This includes the following: (a) meal preparation and delivery." Meal preparation refers to the time and labour to cook a meal or assist someone in preparing a meal.

But the NDIS will not fund the cost of the food itself. The transitional Rules detail that "groceries: including all food, beverage, cleaning, household and health products" cannot be claimed through the NDIS.

This is not an arbitrary policy quirk. It flows directly from the scheme's foundational philosophy: the NDIS is designed to address costs that arise **because of** disability, not costs that everyone in the community bears regardless of disability status.

The reason for this falls under the reasonable and necessary criteria and the idea that every meal has ingredients. Regardless of whether you have a disability, every meal for every person has ingredients. Food, therefore, is classified as an everyday living cost — and everyday living costs are the financial responsibility of the participant, not the scheme.

The Legal Framework: Section 34 and the 'Reasonable and Necessary' Test

NDIS meal funding does not exist in isolation — it operates within a precise legal framework that governs every funding decision the NDIA makes.

The legal basis for NDIS funding decisions is Section 34 of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013. Under this section, the NDIA must be satisfied that the requested support meets the reasonable and necessary criteria before it can be included in a participant's plan.

The reasonable and necessary support criteria are listed in Section 34 of the National Disability Insurance Act 2013. To be funded, a support must: be necessary to address needs arising from an impairment that meets the disability requirements; assist the person to pursue their goals, objectives and aspirations; and assist the person to undertake activities that facilitate the person's social and economic participation.

Additionally, the support must represent value for money in that the costs of the support are reasonable, relative to both the benefits achieved and the cost of alternative support, and the support will be, or is likely to be, effective and beneficial.

Applied to meal funding specifically, this means the NDIA assesses whether a participant's disability — not their lifestyle preference or dietary choices — is the reason they cannot safely prepare meals. The NDIS considers each case individually. They look at: whether the support helps you achieve your plan goals (for example, living more independently or maintaining health); whether the need arises because of your disability, not just convenience; and whether the cost is reasonable compared to alternatives.

What Counts as Disability-Related Need?

The NDIA has identified specific functional limitations that justify meal preparation funding. Common qualifying circumstances include:

- You can't safely use a stove or handle knives due to your disability; you have limited mobility or fine motor skills that make cooking unsafe; or you're unable to lift pots or carry groceries.
- You can't use a stove safely due to mobility or sensory challenges, or you fatigue easily and can't cook consistently.
- The NDIS will also fund meal preparation and delivery if your primary carer and their allocated support time does not allow enough time or opportunity to assist you with food shopping or cooking.

Conversely, if you (or your primary carer) are able to food shop and cook for yourself, the NDIS does not cover meal preparation and delivery.

It is critical to understand that having a specific medical condition or dietary need — such as diabetes, food allergies, or coeliac disease — does not, on its own, qualify a participant for meal funding. The NDIS does not fund any other nutrition supports unrelated to your disability, such as: weight loss programs; eating disorders; food allergies; or diabetes, cardiovascular disease, renal disease, or irritable bowel syndrome. The qualifying factor must always be a **functional inability** to prepare meals safely, not the dietary content of the meals themselves (see our guide on **NDIS Meal Delivery Eligibility: Who Qualifies and What Evidence You Need**).

Where Meal Funding Sits in Your NDIS Plan

Support Category and Budget

Under the NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits 2025–26, food, meals or meal supports generally sit under the Core Supports category, specifically: Assistance with Daily Life (Support Category 01), which includes help with daily activities like cooking, shopping for food or personal care.

Meal Preparation and Delivery is included in your NDIS plan under 'Core Supports'. In Core Supports, it sits under the category 'Assistance with Daily Living'.

The Support Item Codes

Two support item codes are relevant to meal preparation and delivery:

- ****01_022_0120_1_1**** — The original, quote-required support item for meal preparation and delivery. This older item may still apply in some cases where it is specifically included in the participant's plan and remains subject to quote requirements.

- ****01_023_0120_1_1**** — The newer, more flexible item introduced from March 2022. Participants who have core support funding specified for meal preparation and delivery, including for support workers to undertake shopping and meal preparation support, will be able to claim meal preparation and delivery as an alternative to support worker via this mechanism. This new support item does not require a quote, is not a stated support, and can be used where it has been specified as a reasonable and necessary support in a participant's plan with core funding available.

Eligible participants should have core support funding specifically for "assistance with the cost of the preparation and delivery of meals" (item numbers: 01_022_0120_1_1 or 01_023_0120_1_1).

Does It Need to Be Explicitly Listed in Your Plan?

This is a source of significant confusion. Meal preparation and delivery doesn't have to be stated in a plan. If it is reasonable and necessary for the participant, it can be purchased flexibly from their core funding budget. However, following the October 2024 legislative changes (discussed below), participants must ensure their plan explicitly supports this use (see our guide on **NDIS Meal Funding Rules After the October 2024 'Back on Track' Changes**).

What the NDIS Funds vs. What It Does Not Fund

The following table provides a clear, structured summary of the funding boundaries for NDIS meal support:

| Item | **Funded by NDIS** | **Not Funded by NDIS** |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|
| Labour cost of meal preparation (cooking, assembly) | Yes | No |
| Cost of food ingredients | Yes | No |
| Delivery cost to participant's home | Yes | No |
| Groceries and beverages | Yes | No |
| Support worker time spent shopping and cooking | Yes | No |
| Fast food and takeaway services | No | Yes |
| Support worker time assisting participant to cook | Yes | No |
| UberEats, DoorDash, Menulog orders | No | Yes |
| Liquid thickeners for dysphagia (if clinically prescribed) | Yes | No |
| Meal kit services (e.g., Marley Spoon, HelloFresh) | No | Yes |
| Enteral feeding equipment (if clinically required) | Yes | No |
| Vitamins and everyday health supplements | Yes | No |
| Dietitian-designed nutrition plan (if disability-related) | Yes | No |
| Weight loss programs or convenience food services | No | Yes |

The NDIS only funds the preparation and delivery of meals — not the cost of the food itself. This means that the cost of support workers preparing and delivering meals can be claimed, while food costs and commercial food delivery service fees (e.g., Uber Eats, Menulog) are not covered, as food is considered an everyday living expense.

Meal kit services such as Marley Spoon and Hello Fresh do not meet the criteria for meal preparation and delivery as they are ingredient delivery services with no meal preparation component.

The Two Pathways to NDIS-Funded Meal Support

There are two distinct mechanisms through which a participant can access NDIS-funded meal support. Understanding both is essential to maximising your plan.

Pathway 1: Support Worker Meal Preparation

A support worker can help you shop for or prepare your own meals or prepare a meal for you. This can be funded under the CORE Support — Assistance with daily living part of your NDIS plan. This pathway is particularly suited to participants who benefit from skill-building and social engagement during the cooking process (see our guide on *Support Worker Meal Preparation vs. NDIS Meal Delivery Services: Which Is Right for You?*).

Pathway 2: Registered Meal Delivery Services

The NDIS can fund the preparation and delivery cost of prepared meals (but not the ingredients cost). This is estimated to be approximately 70% of the total cost.

For example, if a meal service charges \$14 per meal, and \$6 covers ingredients while \$8 covers preparation and delivery, the NDIS may fund the \$8 portion only — if it's considered reasonable and necessary.

This pathway requires a registered provider capable of issuing compliant, itemised invoices. Meal delivery services that support NDIS participants must provide NDIS-specific invoices that separate the cost of the food (paid by the participant) from the cost of the meal preparation and delivery (paid by the NDIS).

Critically, you must use a meal delivery platform where the food and ingredient component can be separately identified from the meal preparation and delivery component, like Able Foods or Lite n' Easy.

Can You Switch Between Pathways?

Yes, with conditions. If your plan includes funding for a support worker to help with meal preparation, and the support worker is temporarily unavailable, you can use this funding flexibly for meal delivery services for a short period. However, this arrangement should be temporary, and you may need to provide evidence if it extends for a longer time.

The October 2024 Rule Changes: A Critical Shift

The legislative landscape for NDIS meal funding changed significantly on 3 October 2024. Whilst meals may have been a flexible support item in the past, from the 3rd October 2024, the NDIA announced that NDIS participants will only be able to use their NDIS funds for items that are listed as approved supports.

As of October 3, meals from fast-food services, takeaway food, or food delivery platforms (such as Uber Eats, Door Dash, Menulog) are no longer considered 'NDIS supports' and cannot be claimed using NDIS funds.

The good news is that properly structured meal delivery services remain fundable. The "Core Supports (Daily Activities) — assistance with the cost of meal preparation and delivery of meals" is still a funded line item, but must be listed as an approved support in your plan.

The transitional Rules say that 'fast food services, takeaway food and food delivery platforms' are generally not NDIS supports. However, there is an exception for 'meal delivery platforms where the food and ingredient component can be separately identified from the meal preparation and delivery component.'

For a full breakdown of what changed, what stayed the same, and how to ensure your plan remains compliant, see our dedicated guide on [*NDIS Meal Funding Rules After the October 2024 'Back on Track' Changes*](#).

What About Specialised Nutritional Supports?

Beyond standard meal preparation and delivery, the NDIS does fund certain specialised nutritional supports — but only where a participant's disability creates clinical nutritional needs that cannot be met through ordinary food and drink.

Nutritional supports are 'Disability health-related supports', designed to assist participants to maintain their health and wellbeing through support to manage their diet. Nutritional support can take many forms, including a qualified dietitian creating a nutritional plan for a participant.

The NDIS can fund specialised products and supplements if a person's disability means they can't meet their nutritional needs through food and drink. Examples include equipment and maintenance that enables PEG or HEN administration, including enteral feeding tubes, pumps, feed bags and bottles, syringes, and giving sets to put formula into feeding tubes; and modified foods such as liquid thickener, which can assist a participant in digesting and swallowing food safely.

To access this funding, the participant must provide evidence from an allied health professional, such as a dietitian. The evidence must include a nutrition plan and explain how these supports suit the participant's individual nutrition needs.

A Practical Example: How the Funding Works in Real Life

Consider a participant named Sarah, a 34-year-old woman with multiple sclerosis who experiences significant fatigue and has limited fine motor control. She lives alone and her occupational therapist has documented that she cannot safely operate a stove or handle sharp utensils without risk of injury. Her NDIS plan includes Core Supports — Assistance with Daily Life.

Sarah's planner approves meal preparation and delivery as a reasonable and necessary support because her disability directly prevents her from cooking safely. She orders from a registered NDIS meal delivery provider three times per week.

Each meal costs \$16.50. The provider's NDIS-compliant invoice separates the cost as: -
Food/ingredients component: \$5.00 (Sarah's responsibility) - **Preparation and delivery component: \$11.50** (claimable from NDIS Core budget)

This is usually 70% of the total cost of the order, meaning that after being reimbursed by the NDIS, the participant has just paid 30% of the total fees.

Sarah's plan manager processes the \$11.50 portion against her Core Supports budget using support item 01_023_0120_1_1. For a full explanation of how this billing process works across self-managed, plan-managed, and NDIA-managed participants, see our guide on [*How NDIS Meal Delivery Billing Works: Invoices, Plan Management, and Claiming*](#).

Key Takeaways

- **The NDIS funds labour, not food.** The scheme covers the cost of meal preparation and delivery — the time and skill involved in cooking and transporting meals — but not the cost of food ingredients, which are classified as everyday living expenses for all Australians.

- **The legal basis is Section 34 of the NDIS Act 2013.** The legal basis for NDIS funding decisions is Section 34 of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013, which requires that every funded support be reasonable and necessary, directly linked to disability, and represent value for money.

- **Two support item codes apply.** Items 01_022_0120_1_1 and 01_023_0120_1_1 both cover meal preparation and delivery under Core Supports — Assistance with Daily Life (Support Category 01).

- **The 70/30 split is the standard model.** The NDIS funds the preparation and delivery cost of prepared meals (but not the ingredients cost), estimated to be approximately 70% of the total cost. Participants pay the remaining ~30% as a co-payment.

- **Post-October 2024, only approved-list providers qualify.** Food or meals prepared and delivered by a fast-food service, takeaway food or food delivery platforms (for example UberEats, DoorDash) are not considered 'NDIS supports' and cannot be claimed using NDIS funds. Only registered providers who issue itemised invoices separating food costs from preparation and delivery costs are eligible.

Conclusion

NDIS meal funding is not a blanket subsidy for food — it is a precisely defined support that covers the labour component of meal preparation and delivery for participants whose disability functionally prevents them from cooking safely. This distinction, grounded in Section 34 of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*, shapes every aspect of how meal support is accessed, billed, and managed within the scheme.

For participants and their support networks, understanding this foundational principle is the starting point for everything else: determining eligibility, gathering the right clinical evidence, choosing a compliant provider, and structuring invoices correctly. The articles in this series build directly on these foundations — from the eligibility criteria and the step-by-step process of getting meal support added to your plan, to provider comparisons, co-payment calculations, and the implications of the October 2024 legislative changes.

If you are unsure whether meal preparation and delivery is appropriate for your plan, the first step is always to discuss your functional limitations with your GP, occupational therapist, or support coordinator, and to frame your request clearly around how your disability — not your dietary preferences — prevents you from preparing meals safely.

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