

701—231.3(423) Sales of food and food ingredients. On and after July 1, 2004, the sales price from all sales of food and food ingredients is exempt from tax. For the purposes of this rule, “food and food ingredients” means substances, whether in liquid, concentrated, solid, frozen, dried, or dehydrated form, that are sold for ingestion or chewing by humans and are consumed for their taste or nutritional value.

231.3(1) Most substances can easily be classified either as food, food ingredients, or nonfood items. There are, however, certain substances that are not readily distinguishable as food or nonfood and may present problems in judgment. The following guidelines apply to some of the more unique categories of eligible foods and food ingredients and ineligible nonfood items about which questions may arise. The guidelines and their lists are not to be considered all-inclusive:

a. Foods eligible for purchase with food coupons. Sales of almost all substances which may be purchased with food coupons issued by the United States Department of Agriculture under the regulations in effect on July 1, 1974, remain exempt from tax on and after July 1, 2004. However, since the exemption no longer depends on ability to be purchased with food stamps (reference 701—subrule 20.1(1)), sales of certain substances which can be purchased with food stamps but are neither food nor food ingredients are taxable on and after July 1, 2004.

These taxable sales include garden seeds and plants sold for use in gardens to produce food for human consumption. Seeds and plants eligible for purchase with food coupons include vegetable seeds and food-producing plants such as tomato and green pepper plants and fruit trees, food-producing roots, bushes, and bulbs (e.g., asparagus roots and onion sets) and seeds and plants used to produce spices for use in cooking foods. Sales of all these substances are taxable. Sales of chewing gum are taxable as sales of “candy” on and after July 1, 2004.

b. Distilled water and ice. These substances, although having some nonfood uses, are largely used as food or as ingredients in food for human consumption. Unless these substances are specifically labeled for nonfood use or the recipient indicates that they will be used for some purpose other than as food for human consumption or as ingredients in food for human consumption, their sales are exempt from tax.

c. Specialty foods. This category of eligible foods includes special dietary foods (e.g., diabetic and dietetic), enriched or fortified foods, infant formulas, and certain foods commonly referred to as health food items. These substances are food products which are substituted for more commonly used food items in the diet, and thus they are purchased for ingestion by humans and are consumed for their taste or nutritional value. Examples of items in this category of eligible foods are Metrecal, Enfamil, Sustegen, wheat germ, brewer’s yeast, sunflower seeds which are packaged for human consumption, and rose hips powder which is used for preparing tea. It is not possible to formulate a comprehensive list of eligible specialty foods. The guideline to be used to determine the eligibility of a specific product is the ordinary use of the product.

NOTE: If the product is primarily used as a food or as an ingredient in food, then it is an eligible item; if it is primarily used for medicinal purposes as either a therapeutic agent or a deficiency corrector and only occasionally used as a food, the product is not an eligible item.

d. Snack foods. These substances are food items and, therefore, are usually eligible for the exemption. Typical examples of snack foods are cheese puffs; corn chips; popcorn; peanuts; potato chips and sticks; packaged cookies, cupcakes, and donuts; and pretzels. Alcoholic beverages, candy, and soft drinks are examples of snack foods the sales of which are not exempt from tax; see subrule 231.3(2).

e. Others. There are certain eligible food substances which are normally consumed only after being incorporated into foods sold for ingestion or chewing by humans. Sales of substances which are ingredients of items identical to those which are eligible for exemption when sold as finished products are sales eligible for exemption. Since these substances are food ingredients, their sales are exempt. An example is pectin. Pectin is the generic term for products marketed under various brand names and commonly used as a base in making jams and jellies. When pectin is incorporated into jams or jellies, it becomes part of a food for human consumption and, therefore, is an eligible food item. Other examples are lard and vegetable oils.

f. The following general classifications of food products are also exempt from tax unless taxable as prepared food; see rule 701—231.5(423):

Bread and flour products
 Bottled water, unless it is a sweetened bottled water and thus taxable as a soft drink (a change from previous law; reference 701—subparagraph 20.1(3) “b”(1))
 Cereal and cereal products
 Cocoa and cocoa products, unless taxable in the form of candy as in rule 701—231.4(423)
 Coffee and coffee substitutes, unless taxable as soft drinks; see paragraph 231.3(2) “f”
 Dietary substitutes, other than dietary supplements; see paragraphs 231.3(1) “c” and 231.3(2) “a”
 Eggs and egg products
 Fish and fish products
 Frozen foods
 Fruits and fruit products including fruit juices, unless taxable as soft drinks; see paragraph 231.3(2) “f”
 Margarine, butter, and shortening
 Meat and meat products
 Milk and milk products, including packaged ice cream products
 Milk substitutes, such as soy and rice milk substitutes (a change from previous law; reference 701—subparagraph 20.1(3) “b”(2))
 Spices, condiments, extracts, and artificial food coloring
 Sugar and sugar products and substitutes, unless taxable in the form of candy as in rule 701—231.4(423)
 Tea, unless taxable as a soft drink; see paragraph 231.3(2) “f”
 Vegetables and vegetable products

231.3(2) Substances excluded from the term “food and food ingredients.” Sales of alcoholic beverages, candy, dietary supplements, food sold through vending machines, prepared food, soft drinks, and tobacco are not sales of “food” and are not exempt from tax by this rule.

a. “Alcoholic beverages” means beverages that are suitable for human consumption and contain one-half of 1 percent or more of alcohol by volume.
 b. “Candy.” See rule 701—231.4(423).
 c. “Dietary supplement” means any product, other than tobacco, intended to supplement the diet that contains one or more of the following dietary ingredients:

- (1) A vitamin.
- (2) A mineral.
- (3) An herb or other botanical.
- (4) An amino acid.
- (5) A dietary substance for use by humans to supplement the diet by increasing the total dietary intake.
- (6) A concentrate, metabolite, constituent, extract, or combination of any of the ingredients in subparagraphs (1) through (5) that is intended for ingestion in tablet, capsule, powder, softgel, gelcap, or liquid form, or if not intended for ingestion in such a form, is not represented as conventional food and is not represented for use as a sole item of a meal or of the diet; and is required to be labeled as a dietary supplement, identifiable by the “supplement facts” box found on the label and as required pursuant to 21 Code of Federal Regulations 101.36.

Dietary supplements, as their name indicates, serve as supplements to food or food products rather than as “food,” and, therefore, are not included within the definition of that word. Since these substances serve as deficiency correctors or therapeutic agents to supplement diets deficient in essential nutrition rather than as foods, they are not eligible for the food and food ingredients exemption. In addition to vitamin and mineral tablets or capsules, this category includes substances such as cod liver oil, which is used primarily as a source of vitamins A and D. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of other such items which are primarily used for medicinal purposes or as health aids and which may be stocked by authorized firms.

d. “Food sold through vending machines” means food dispensed from a machine or other mechanical device that accepts payment, other than food which would be qualified for exemption if

purchased with coupons (commonly known as “food stamps”) issued under the federal Food Stamp Act of 1977, 7 United States Code 2011 et seq. Alcoholic beverages, candy, dietary supplements, prepared food, soft drinks, and tobacco sold through vending machines are sold subject to tax in all instances because they are specifically excluded from this rule’s definition of “foods”; see subrule 231.3(2) generally. This paragraph “d” should be interpreted in such a fashion that if the sale of a substance is exempt from tax because it is a sale of “food” when the substance is sold by means other than a vending machine, then the sale of that same substance through a vending machine will also be exempt from tax. Conversely, if the sale of a substance by any means other than through a vending machine is taxable, then the sale of that same substance through a vending machine will also be taxable.

e. “Prepared food.” See rule 701—231.5(423).

f. “Soft drinks” means nonalcoholic beverages that contain natural or artificial sweeteners. Soft drinks may be noncarbonated. “Soft drinks” does not include beverages that contain milk or milk products; soy, rice, or similar milk substitutes; coffee and tea which are not sweetened; effervescent, noneffervescent, and mineral water sold in containers; beverages that contain greater than 50 percent of vegetable or fruit juice by volume. This latter is a change from the law as it existed prior to July 1, 2004, which required a volume of only 15 percent for exemption.

Taxable soft drinks are noncarbonated water and soda water if naturally or artificially sweetened; soft drinks carbonated and noncarbonated including but not limited to colas, ginger ale, near beer, and root beer; bottled and sweetened tea and coffee; lemonade, orangeade, and all other drinks or punches with natural fruit or vegetable juice less than 50 percent by volume.

Beverage mixes and ingredients intended to be made into soft drinks are taxable. Beverage mixes or ingredients may be liquid or frozen, concentrated or nonconcentrated, dehydrated, powdered, granulated, sweetened or unsweetened, seasoned or unseasoned. Sales of beverage mixes to which a sweetener is to be added before drinking are taxable. Concentrates intended to be made into beverages which contain natural fruit or vegetable juice of less than 50 percent by volume are taxable.

Beverages, the sales of which are otherwise exempt, are taxable if sold as prepared food under rule 701—231.5(423).

Nondairy coffee “creamers” in liquid, frozen or powdered form are not beverages. Sugar or other artificial or natural sweeteners sold separately are not taxable as beverage ingredients. Specialty foods that are liquids or that are to be added to a liquid and that are intended to be a substitute in the diet for more commonly used food items are not beverages and are not taxable as beverages. These foods include infant formula.

g. “Tobacco” means cigarettes, cigars, chewing or pipe tobacco, or any other item that contains tobacco.

231.3(3) Other substances which are not food or food ingredients. Various products are not purchased for ingestion or chewing by humans or, if they are, are not consumed for their taste or nutritional value. Therefore, they are not purchased exempt from tax under this rule. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. Health aids. Over-the-counter medicines and other products used primarily as health aids or therapeutic agents are not foods since they are consumed for their medicinal value as opposed to their nutritional value or taste. Such products include aspirin, cough drops or syrups and other cold remedies, antacids, and all over-the-counter medicines or other products used as health aids. In addition to these commonly used health aids, any product used primarily for medicinal purposes is ineligible. An example of such products is slippery elm powder, a demulcent which is used to soothe sore throats.

b. Items not exempt. The following general classifications of products are subject to tax:

Cosmetics

Household supplies

Paper products

Pet foods and supplies

Soaps and detergents

Tobacco products

Toiletry articles

Tonics

Lunch counter foods or foods prepared for consumption on the premises of the retailer

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code subsection 423.3(56).