

Eating well: partitive articles and meals

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: The partitive article means some and shows an unspecified amount of food: du pain (masculine), de la soupe (feminine), de l'eau (vowel), des pâtes (plural). After a negative or a quantity word such as beaucoup de, it becomes just de or d'. The four French meals are le petit-déjeuner, le déjeuner, le goûter and le dîner.

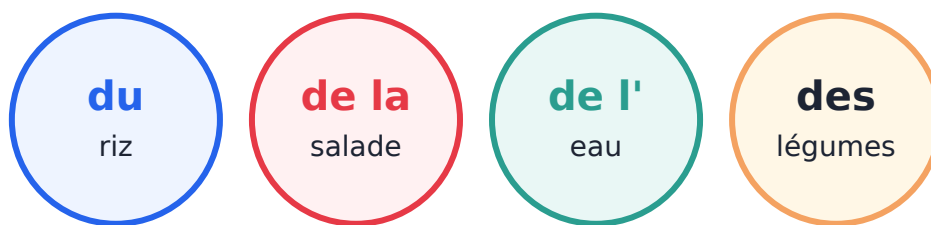
Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

What is the partitive article in French?

Definition

The partitive article names an amount of a food or drink that cannot be counted, or an unspecified number of items. It corresponds to *some* in English, but English often drops it (*I eat bread*) while French cannot: Je mange du pain.

Type of word	Article	Example
masculine	du	Mathis mange du fromage. — Mathis eats cheese.
feminine	de la	Nous mangeons de la soupe. — We eat soup.
vowel or silent h	de l'	Il y a de l'omelette. — There is some omelet.
plural	des	Awa mange des pâtes. — Awa eats pasta.



masculin · féminin · voyelle · pluriel

Four plates, four partitive articles.

When do you use le, la, les instead of du, de la, des?

Rule: like or eat?

Use the definite article to talk about tastes in general: J'adore le chocolat. — I love chocolate.
Use the partitive when you eat, buy or have a portion: Je mange du chocolat. — I am eating some chocolate.

Common mistake

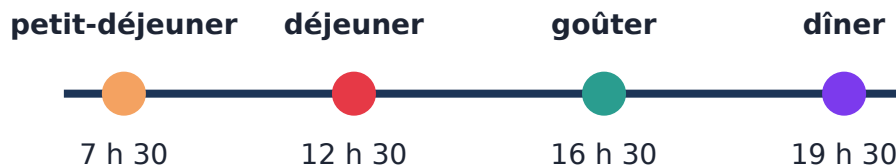
English speakers drop the article, and many then write Je mange pain. The article is required.
Another trap: after a negative or a quantity word, do not keep du, de la or des. Say Je ne mange pas de viande, not pas de la viande.

How do you give a quantity?

Quantity expressions are followed by de (d' before a vowel) with no article.

Expression	Meaning	Example
un peu de	a little	un peu de sel
beaucoup de	a lot of	beaucoup d'eau
assez de / trop de	enough / too much	trop de sucre
un kilo de / une tranche de	a kilo / a slice	une tranche de jambon

What are the French meals?



A typical French day, meal by meal.

Breakfast is light: du pain, de la confiture, du lait. Lunch and dinner are the big meals. The snack after school, le goûter, often means du pain avec du chocolat.

Zoé's tip

Ask yourself: can I count it with a number? Then use un, une or deux. If not, it is du, de la, de l' or des. And when a quantity word shows up, shrink everything to a plain de!

Culture note

School lunch in France is often served in a canteen, the cantine, as a sit-down meal with several courses. In Québec the names shift: le déjeuner is breakfast, le dîner is lunch and le souper is dinner.

Key points to remember

- Partitive forms: du, de la, de l', des; English often leaves out the word some, French never does.
- Use the definite article (le, la, les) for likes and dislikes: J'aime le fromage.
- After pas and after quantity words, use de or d': pas de viande, beaucoup d'eau.
- Le goûter is the French afternoon snack, usually around 16 h 30.
- In Québec, déjeuner is breakfast, dîner is lunch and souper is dinner.

Eating Well: Partitive Articles and Meals: frequently asked questions

What is the partitive article in French?

It is the French way to say some in front of food or drink: du pain, de la soupe, de l'eau, des légumes. It shows an unspecified amount, and it is required even when English leaves some out.

When do du, de la and des become de?

They become de (or d' before a vowel) after a negation such as pas, and after quantity words such as beaucoup, un peu, assez and trop. For example, Il n'y a pas de lait and beaucoup d'eau.

What is the difference between J'aime le fromage and Je mange du fromage?

J'aime le fromage states a taste about cheese in general, so it uses the definite article. Je mange du fromage means you are eating some cheese right now or in general portions, so it uses the partitive.

What are the main meals in French?

They are le petit-déjeuner (breakfast), le déjeuner (lunch), le goûter (afternoon snack) and le dîner (dinner). The goûter is especially common for children and teenagers after school.

Why does Québec use different meal names?

In Québec French, déjeuner means breakfast, dîner means lunch and souper means dinner. France uses déjeuner for lunch and dîner for dinner, so check where your speaker lives.