

CACFP Meal Patterns

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Why CACFP Meal Patterns Are Important

One goal of the CACFP is to serve attractive, tasty meals that meet a child's nutritional needs. Using the CACFP meal pattern, you can offer appealing meals that are consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Careful planning is necessary to meet these goals.

See *Child Care Recipes Food for Health and Fun*, Beef Barbecue Sandwich (F-8) and Coleslaw (E-9).



■ What is a meal pattern?

A meal pattern is the set of food components, food items, and minimum quantities required for a breakfast, supplement (snack), or lunch or supper for a specific age group of children.

The CACFP meal pattern for infants is shown on pages 24 and 25. The CACFP meal pattern for children is shown on pages 26 through 30.

■ What does the CACFP meal pattern help you do?

It helps you plan well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks. Meals and snacks planned with the CACFP meal pattern supply the kinds and amounts of foods that children require to help meet their nutrient and energy needs.

■ What are the age groups for CACFP meal patterns?

An important step in planning and preparing meals through the CACFP is determining the age group (or groups) you will be serving and selecting the correct meal pattern for these children. The age groups are designed to reflect the differing nutritional needs of children.

The CACFP meal pattern for infants is divided into the following age groups:

- Birth through 3 months
- 4 months through 7 months
- 8 months through 11 months

For children ages 1 through 12 years old, the CACFP meal pattern is divided into these age groups:

- Ages 1 through 2 years
- Ages 3 through 5 years
- Ages 6 through 12 years

■ Do the meal patterns show minimum requirements?

The meal patterns specify minimum portion sizes for each meal component. You may serve more of each meal component, but to meet CACFP requirements, you must serve *at least* the minimum. Older children will need larger servings to satisfy their hunger and to get all the nutrients they need.

Meal Pattern Charts

Use the meal pattern charts to plan meals and snacks that include the right food components. Keep these charts in a convenient location and refer to them each time you plan a new menu.

See *Child Care Recipes Food for Health and Fun*, Pancake (A-12) and Maple Applesauce Topping (C-1).



Meal Pattern Chart for Infants

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR INFANTS

| | Breakfast | Lunch or Supper | Snack |
|--|--|---|---|
| Infants Birth through 3 months | 4 to 6 fluid ounces (fl oz) breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 4 to 6 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 4 to 6 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ |
| Infants 4 months through 7 months | 4 to 8 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 4 to 8 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 4 to 6 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ |
| | 0 to 3 tablespoons (Tbsp) infant cereal ^{3,4} | 0 to 3 Tbsp infant cereal ^{3,4} | |
| | | 0 to 3 Tbsp fruit and/or vegetable ⁴ | |

¹ It is recommended that breast milk be served in place of formula from birth through 11 months.

² For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum of breast milk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breast milk may be offered, with additional breast milk offered if the infant is still hungry.

³ Infant formula and dry infant cereal shall be iron-fortified.

⁴ A serving of this component shall be optional.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR INFANTS

| | Breakfast | Lunch or Supper | Snack |
|---|--|---|--|
| Infants 8 months through 11 months | 6 to 8 fluid ounces (fl oz) breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 6 to 8 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ | 2 to 4 fl oz breast milk ^{1,2} or formula ³ or fruit juice ⁵ |
| | 2 to 4 tablespoons (Tbsp) infant cereal ^{3,4} | 2 to 4 Tbsp infant cereal ³ ; <i>and/or</i> 1 to 4 Tbsp meat, fish, poultry, egg yolk, cooked dry beans or peas; or 1/2 to 2 oz cheese; or 1 to 4 oz cottage cheese, cheese food, or cheese spread; and | 0 to 1/2 slice bread ^{4,6} or 0 to 2 crackers ^{4,6} |
| | 1 to 4 Tbsp fruit and/or vegetable | 1 to 4 Tbsp fruit and/or vegetable | |

¹ It is recommended that breast milk be served in place of formula from birth through 11 months.

² For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum of breast milk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breast milk may be offered, with additional breast milk offered if the infant is still hungry.

³ Infant formula and dry infant cereal shall be iron-fortified.

⁴ A serving of this component shall be optional.

⁵ Fruit juice shall be full-strength.

⁶ Bread and bread alternates shall be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour.

Meal Pattern Chart for Children

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN

Breakfast

| | <u>Ages</u> 1 year through 2 years | <u>Ages</u> 3 years through 5 years | <u>Ages</u> 6 years through 12 years |
|--|--|---|--|
| MILK | | | |
| Must be fluid milk | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup | 1 cup |
| VEGETABLE or FRUIT or JUICE¹ | | | |
| | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup |
| GRAINS/BREADS | | | |
| A serving is a bread or bread alternate and/or cereal: | | | |
| Bread, enriched or whole-grain | 1/2 slice | 1/2 slice | 1 slice |
| Cereal, enriched or whole-grain | | | |
| Cold dry cereal ² | 1/4 cup* | 1/3 cup** | 3/4 cup*** |
| or | | | |
| Hot cooked cereal | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |
| Cooked pasta or noodle products | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |

¹ **If you are serving juice:** Try not to serve juice to meet the fruit/vegetable requirement too many times throughout the day. It may fill up the children and take the place of other needed nutrients.

² **If you are serving cold dry cereal for breakfast:**

* For ages 1 and 2 years, serve: 1/4 cup (volume) or 1/3 oz (weight), whichever is less.

** For ages 3 through 5 years, serve: 1/3 cup (volume) or 1/2 oz (weight), whichever is less.

*** For ages 6 through 12 years, serve: 3/4 cup (volume) or 1 oz (weight), whichever is less.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN

Supplement (Snack)

| | <u>Ages</u> 1 year through 2 years | <u>Ages</u> 3 years through 5 years | <u>Ages</u> 6 years through 12 years |
|--|---|--|---|
| Select 2 of the 4 components shown. If you select milk as one of the components, you may <u>not</u> serve fruit juice as the other component. | | | |
| MILK | | | |
| Must be fluid milk | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup | 1 cup |
| MEAT or MEAT ALTERNATE | | | |
| Meat, poultry, or fish (cooked, lean meat without bone) | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| Cheese | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| Egg (large) | 1/2 | 1/2 | 1/2 |
| Cooked dry beans or peas | 1/8 cup | 1/8 cup | 1/4 cup |
| Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters | 1 Tbsp | 1 Tbsp | 2 Tbsp |
| Nuts and/or seeds ¹ | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| Yogurt, plain or sweetened ² | 2 oz | 2 oz | 4 oz |
| VEGETABLE or FRUIT or JUICE³ | | | |
| | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup |

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CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN

Supplement (Snack) continued

| | <u>Ages</u> 1 year through 2 years | <u>Ages</u> 3 years through 5 years | <u>Ages</u> 6 years through 12 years |
|--|--|---|--|
| GRAINS/BREADS | | | |
| A serving is a bread or bread alternate and/or cereal: | | | |
| Bread, enriched or whole-grain | 1/2 slice | 1/2 slice | 1 slice |
| Cereal, enriched or whole-grain | | | |
| Cold dry cereal ⁴ | 1/4 cup* | 1/3 cup** | 3/4 cup*** |
| or | | | |
| Hot cooked cereal | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |
| Cooked pasta or noodle products | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |

¹ If you are serving nuts and seeds for a supplement (snack):

For determining combinations:

1 oz of nuts or seeds = 1 oz of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish.

Tree nuts and seeds that may be used as meat alternates are listed on page 34.

CAUTION: *Children under 4 years of age are at the highest risk of choking.* For this age group, USDA recommends that nuts and/or seeds be ground or finely chopped and served to children in prepared food. (See Appendix A for information on how to prevent choking.)

² Commercially prepared yogurt is now permitted as a meat/meat alternate.

You may serve 4 oz (weight) or 1/2 cup (volume) of plain, sweetened, or flavored yogurt to fulfill the equivalent of 1 oz of the meat/meat alternate component. For younger children, 2 oz (weight) or 1/4 cup (volume) fulfills the equivalent of 1/2 oz of the meat/meat alternate requirement.

³ If you are serving juice: Try not to serve juice to meet the fruit/vegetable requirement too many times throughout the day. It may fill up the children and take the place of other needed nutrients.

⁴ If you are serving cold dry cereal for a supplement (snack):

* For ages 1 and 2 years, serve: 1/4 cup (volume) or 1/3 oz (weight), whichever is less.

** For ages 3 through 5 years, serve: 1/3 cup (volume) or 1/2 oz (weight), whichever is less.

*** For ages 6 through 12 years, serve: 3/4 cup (volume) or 1 oz (weight), whichever is less.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN

Lunch or Supper

| | <u>Ages</u> 1 year through 2 years | <u>Ages</u> 3 years through 5 years | <u>Ages</u> 6 years through 12 years |
|--|---|--|---|
| MILK | | | |
| Must be fluid milk | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup | 1 cup |
| MEAT or MEAT ALTERNATE | | | |
| Meat, poultry, or fish (cooked, lean meat without bone) | 1 oz | 1½ oz | 2 oz |
| Cheese | 1 oz | 1½ oz | 2 oz |
| Egg (large) | 1/2 | 3/4 | 1 |
| Cooked dry beans or peas | 1/4 cup | 3/8 cup | 1/2 cup |
| Peanut butter or other nut or seed butters | 2 Tbsp | 3 Tbsp | 4 Tbsp |
| Nuts and/or seeds ¹ | 1/2 oz | 3/4 oz | 1 oz |
| Yogurt, plain or sweetened ² | 4 oz | 6 oz | 8 oz |
| VEGETABLE or FRUIT or JUICE³ | | | |
| Serve two different vegetables and/or fruits to equal | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup |

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CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN

Lunch or Supper continued

| | <u>Ages</u> 1 year through 2 years | <u>Ages</u> 3 years through 5 years | <u>Ages</u> 6 years through 12 years |
|---|---|--|---|
| GRAINS/BREADS | | | |
| A serving is a bread or bread alternate and/or cooked cereal: | | | |
| Bread, enriched or whole-grain | 1/2 slice | 1/2 slice | 1 slice |
| Cooked cereal grains, enriched or whole-grain | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |
| Cooked pasta or noodle products | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |

¹ **If you are serving nuts and seeds for lunch or supper:** This portion can meet only one-half of the total serving of the meat/meat alternate requirement.

For determining combinations:

1 oz of nuts or seeds = 1 oz of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish.

Tree nuts and seeds that may be used as meat alternates are listed on page 34.

CAUTION: *Children under 4 years of age are at the highest risk of choking.* For this age group, USDA recommends that nuts and/or seeds be ground or finely chopped and served to children in prepared food. (See Appendix A for information on how to prevent choking.)

² **Commercially prepared yogurt is now permitted as a meat/meat alternate.**

You may serve 4 oz (weight) or 1/2 cup (volume) of plain, sweetened, or flavored yogurt to fulfill the equivalent of 1 oz of the meat/meat alternate component. For younger children, 2 oz (weight) or 1/4 cup (volume) fulfills the equivalent of 1/2 oz of the meat/meat alternate requirement.

³ **If you are serving juice:** Try not to serve juice to meet the fruit/vegetable requirement too many times throughout the day. It may fill up the children and take the place of other needed nutrients.

Meal Components

Here is more information about each of the meal components used in the CACFP meal pattern for children. These components are:

- Milk
- Meat and Meat Alternates
- Vegetables and Fruits
- Grains and Breads



Milk

Milk is an excellent source of protein, calcium, phosphorus, riboflavin, and vitamins A and D. Lowfat or skim milk is generally fortified with vitamins A and D.

Here are some things you need to know about this component:

- The milk component of the meal may be any fluid type of pasteurized whole, lowfat, or skim milk that is flavored or unflavored or cultured buttermilk. All milk served must meet State and local standards for fluid milk.
- At breakfast or snacks, use milk as a beverage, on cereal, or as a beverage and on cereal. At lunch or supper, milk must be served as a beverage.

To add calcium and improve the nutritional quality of the meal:

- You can use additional milk (fluid, evaporated, or nonfat dry milk) to prepare soups, casseroles, puddings, bakery items, or other baked or cooked products.
- However, this additional milk does *not* contribute to the required quantity at the meal.



Meat and Meat Alternates

Meat and meat alternates, as a food group, provide protein, iron, zinc, B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, B12), and other nutrients. Some choices within the group (cheese and yogurt) are not sources of iron but are high in protein.

Here are some things you need to know about this component:

- The meat and meat alternate component must be served at lunch and supper. Include a serving of cooked lean meat (beef, pork, lamb, veal), poultry, fish, cheese, cooked dry beans or peas, eggs, peanut butter or other nut or seed butters (almond, sesame, sunflower), or nuts or seeds (see caution on page 34), yogurt, or any combination.
- The meat and meat alternate may be served as part of the snack. At breakfast, it may be served as an additional item.
- For lunch and supper, the meat and meat alternate must be served in the main dish or in the main dish and one other menu item.



About Nuts and Seeds...

- **For the *snack*, how much of the meat and meat alternate requirement may nuts and seeds fulfill?**

Nuts and seeds may fulfill *all* of the meat and meat alternate requirement for the snack.

- **For *lunch or supper*, how much of the meat and meat alternate requirement may nuts and seeds fulfill?**

Nuts and seeds may fulfill *up to one-half* of the meat and meat alternate requirement for lunch or supper. To fulfill the lunch or supper requirement, nuts and seeds must be combined with another meat or meat alternate.

For determining combinations: 1 ounce of nuts or seeds is equal to 1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish.

- **Which nuts and seeds may be used as a meat alternate?**

Peanuts, soynuts, tree nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts, and pecans), and seeds (sunflower, sesame, squash, and pumpkin).

CAUTION: Children under 4 years old are at the highest risk of choking. As a result...

- When you are serving children under 4 years old, USDA recommends nuts and/or seeds be served ground or finely chopped in a prepared food.
- Be aware that meat products, such as meat sticks and hot dogs, can also be choking hazards.
- Be careful about children choking on bones, especially in chicken and fish.

For more information on choking, see Appendix A, *Infant and Child Lifesaving Steps*.

About yogurt...

Yogurt is very popular with children. Children like the smooth texture of yogurt, and it can be flavored for children's tastes.

Here are some things to keep in mind about serving yogurt as part of the meat and meat alternate component.

- Commercially prepared yogurt may be used as a meat or meat alternate for children age 1 year and older.
- Yogurt is a very good source of calcium. However, yogurt has no iron and often is sweetened, so it should not be a frequent choice at lunch or supper as a substitute for meat/poultry.
- Serve 4 ounces (weight) or 1/2 cup (volume) of plain or sweetened and flavored yogurt to fulfill the equivalent of 1 ounce of the meat and meat alternate component.
- Six ounces (weight) or 3/4 cup (volume) fulfills the equivalent of 1½ ounce of the meat and meat alternate requirement.
- Homemade yogurt and frozen yogurt or other yogurt-flavored products (such as yogurt bars, yogurt-covered fruit and/or nuts) *may not* be credited as a meat or meat alternate.
- When purchasing yogurt, read and compare the labels to know what you are buying. The fruit within yogurt, whether blended, mixed, or presented on top, cannot be credited towards the fruit requirement.
- Extra fruit that you add to the yogurt, such as fresh strawberries, canned peaches, or banana slices, can count towards the fruit component.

Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables and/or fruits, as a food group, are an important part of a varied diet and contain substances linked to good health. These foods are generally low in fat in their natural form. You will also get more dietary fiber into children's diets by serving a wide variety of vegetables and fruits.

Here are some things you need to know about this component:

- At breakfast, a serving of fruit or vegetable or full-strength (100 percent) fruit or vegetable juice is required. (See page 37 for some menu planning tips, such as ways to include foods containing vitamin C. Also see page 37 for a cautionary note about unpasteurized juices.)
- For lunch and supper, serve two or more vegetables and/or fruits at each meal. For these meals, *up to one-half* of the total requirement may be met with full-strength fruit or vegetable juice.
- For the snack, juice may not be served if milk is selected as the only other component.

More about vegetables and fruits...

- Cooked vegetables means a serving of drained vegetables.
- A serving of cooked or canned fruit consists of fruit *and* juice.
- Thawed frozen fruit includes fruit with the thawed juice.



Some Menu Planning Tips...

- For variety, serve fruits and/or vegetables for mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks.
- Breakfast is a good time to serve foods containing vitamin C, such as citrus fruits and juices, like oranges or grapefruit. Some other fruits containing vitamin C are bananas, strawberries, and cantaloupe.
- Select canned fruits that are packed in fruit juice or light syrup.
- Consider using dried fruits, such as apricots, raisins, and prunes, to provide variety in menus.
- See Appendix B *What Foods are Good Sources of Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Calcium, and Iron?*



CAUTION: SERVE PASTEURIZED JUICES

Serious outbreaks of foodborne illness have been traced to the drinking of unpasteurized juices.

Pasteurizing kills any harmful bacteria that may be present in juice. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you serve only those juices that have been pasteurized. To help you identify juices that have not been pasteurized, the Food and Drug Administration requires a warning about unpasteurized juice on these products.

Grains and Breads

Grain products add interest and variety to meals. They can be a good source of vitamins and minerals as well as complex carbohydrates (starch and dietary fiber).

Below are important facts about this component along with some menu planning tips. For a complete list of acceptable grains and breads and minimum serving sizes, refer to Appendix C.

Facts about Grains and Breads...

■ **What is important to know about grain and bread items?**

Grain and bread items must be enriched or whole-grain, made from enriched or whole-grain meal or flour, or if the product is a cereal, it must be whole-grain, enriched, or fortified. Bran and germ are credited the same as enriched or whole-grain meal or flour.

■ **Why is folic acid one of the nutrients added to enrich products?**

Since early 1996, U.S. food manufacturers have been required to add folic acid to most enriched breads, flours, cornmeal, pasta, rice, breakfast cereals, and other grain products to reduce the risk of neural tube birth defects in newborns. This is just one example of how enriching foods can be helpful.



■ **What are some examples of *enriched* breads, cereals, and pasta? What do they contribute to a child's diet?**

Enriched breads, cereals, and pasta are sources of complex carbohydrates (starch); thiamin; niacin; and iron. Examples include:

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| bagels | noodles |
| cornbread | corn muffins |
| grits | pita bread |
| crackers | ready-to-eat cereal |
| pasta | white bread and rolls |

■ **What are some examples of *whole-grain* breads, cereals, and pasta? What do they contribute to a child's diet?**

Whole-grain breads, cereals, and pasta are sources of complex carbohydrates (starch and dietary fiber); copper; iron; magnesium; phosphorus; thiamin; riboflavin; and niacin. Examples include:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| brown rice | whole-wheat pasta |
| corn tortillas | whole-wheat crackers |
| oatmeal | whole-wheat bread and rolls |
| whole-grain rye bread | |
| whole-grain, ready-to-eat cereals | |

■ **Do some grains/breads contain added fat?**

Yes, some grains/breads contain added fat. Some examples of these foods include croissants, donuts, honey buns, sweet rolls, cakes, cookies, snack-type crackers, tortilla chips, and other kinds of snack chips.

If you want to serve any of these products, be sure to read food labels to be aware of the amount of fat they contain, and be careful to limit the frequency that these foods are served to children. It is suggested that these kinds of foods be served no more than twice a week.

Menu Planning Ideas for Adding Grain Products to Your Menus...

When making sandwiches...

- Make sandwiches with whole-wheat bagels.
- Use 1/2 slice whole-wheat bread and 1/2 slice white bread.

When preparing main dishes or salads...

- Use rice, noodles, oats, cornmeal, or bulgur in main dishes.
- Serve different kinds of pasta salads for a change of pace.

When baking or buying grain products...

- Make or buy quick breads, muffins, crackers, or cookies with whole grains or whole-grain flours.
- Substitute whole-grain flour for part of the flour used in recipes.
- Serve whole-grain breads and cereals at breakfast and for snacks.
- Read ingredient labels to determine what is in the product. (Ingredients are listed in order by weight.)



Some Important Reminders about Bread and Bread Alternates...

- **See Appendix C for a complete list of acceptable grains/breads.**

Appendix C is an important resource as you plan menus. It contains a complete list of acceptable grains and breads and minimum serving sizes.

- **Check food labels carefully to see if snack foods are enriched.**

Some grain-based snack-type products (such as hard pretzels, hard bread sticks, and tortilla chips made from enriched or whole-grain meal or flour) can be used to meet the bread requirement. Check the food label to ensure these products are enriched.

- **Keep in mind that some products will not count for lunch or supper even though they may be used for breakfast and/or snacks.**

Sweet grain-based products, such as toaster pastries, coffee cakes, donuts, sweet rolls, cake and cookies may be used as a bread alternate for breakfast and/or snacks but may not be used as a bread alternate for lunch or supper. However, USDA recommends that they be served no more than twice a week because of their high sugar and/or fat content.

- **Be aware that some foods contain more sugar, fat, or salt than others.**

Some bread items and the items you serve with them (such as jams, jellies, margarine, and spreads) may contain more sugar, fat, or salt than others. Keep this in mind when considering how often to serve them.

Meal Pattern Exceptions

Using the CACFP meal pattern for menu planning is an important requirement for participating in the CACFP. May a child care center request an exception? Yes, but only under certain circumstances as described below.

Under what circumstances may a child care center request approval for an exception to using the CACFP meal pattern?

A child care center may request approval from its State agency for an exception to using the CACFP meal pattern for menu planning when the center contracts to have meals provided by a school *and* that school does the following two things:

- participates in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program; and
- uses an approved menu planning alternative.

Under these circumstances, the child care center may request approval from the State agency for the school to use the same menu planning system for the child care meals as it does for school meals.

For more information, contact your State agency.