

How to Serve Food Based on CACFP Standards

Children need a wide variety of foods in the proper amounts to support optimal growth and development. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) standards support this growth, improve the nutrition intake, and promote the development of healthy eating habits in children and adults.

Adhering to the CACFP standards will allow you to best meet the needs of the children in your care and receive reimbursement for the meals served.

Foods that are claimed for reimbursement are divided into four food components or groups. The four food components are meat/meat alternate, fruits and/or vegetables, grains/breads, and milk. Some state agencies have standards for fat, sugar, and salt intake allowed in foods served in the program.

Foods that do not fit into these four food components are classified as “other foods” or “extras”. These are foods that do not meet requirements for any food component in the CACFP Meal Pattern, and often are used to make meals more appealing, such as condiments. Sometimes these foods are

high in fat, sugar, or salt. Remember to review food labels, limiting foods that are classified as “others” or “extras”. Check with your state agency or sponsor for current allowable foods.

Meat/Meat Alternate Component

Meat/Meat Alternate Component Foods provide protein, iron, B vitamins (riboflavin, thiamin, niacin), and other nutrients, such as fiber found in beans, nuts, and seeds.



Foods included: meats (lean), poultry, fish, cheese, yogurt, eggs, cooked dry beans/peas, and peanut butter and other nut/seed butters. Some children may have food allergies to peanut butter, eggs, and nuts. Be conscious of the needs of all children in your care and plan accordingly. Commercially processed meat items such as chicken nuggets, corndogs, pizza, etc. will need a Child Nutrition (CN) Label, or manufacturer’s product analysis or identification sheet to determine proper crediting. A meat/meat alternate must be served at lunch and supper to meet meal pattern requirements for children ages 1 to 12. See your state agency or sponsor for current

crediting requirements. Make sure foods served to children will not pose a choking hazard.

Fruits and/or Vegetables Component

Fruits and/or Vegetables Component Foods provide vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber.



Foods included: fresh, frozen, dried, canned fruits and vegetables. Offer a wide variety to improve the nutrition intake of children including dark green leafy vegetables, dark orange vegetables, citrus fruits, legumes, and starchy vegetables. Count potatoes and corn as a vegetable and not as a grain/bread or starch. Two different fruits and/or vegetables must be served at lunch or supper to meet meal pattern requirements for children ages 1 to 12. Juice and milk cannot be served together as a reimbursable snack for children ages 1 to 12.

Grains/Breads Component

Grains/Breads Component Foods provide iron, fiber, some B vitamins (thiamin, niacin, riboflavin), and complex carbohydrates.



Foods included: whole-grain or enriched breads, pasta, cereal, bread products such as crackers, and pancakes. To meet CACFP meal pattern requirements all grains and breads must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour. Read your Nutrition Facts Labels carefully to determine proper crediting. Rice is counted as a grain/bread on CACFP and not as a vegetable. Check with your state agency or sponsor for current crediting requirements.

Milk Component

Milk Component Foods provide calcium, vitamins D and A, riboflavin, and other nutrients.



Milk served must be pasteurized flavored or unflavored fluid milk. Serve pasteurized fluid milk to children ages 1 to 12. According to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010, children above the age of two years must be served one of the following: fat-free (skim) or low-fat milk (1%), fat-free or low-fat lactose free milk, fat-free or low-fat lactose reduced milk, fat-free or low-fat buttermilk, or fat-free or low-fat acidified milk. Avoid serving children above the age of two years whole and 2% reduced-fat milk. Children who require special dietary requirements can be exempt from this new standard, but all non-dairy

beverages must meet nutritional standards. Check with your state agency or sponsor for current milk requirements and nutritional standards.



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Reimbursement is based on you providing meals that meet the CACFP Meal Pattern requirements for the child's age group. Meal patterns consist of food components, food items, and minimum food quantities required by age group. There are meal patterns for breakfast, lunch, supplement (snack), and supper. Children have different nutritional needs at various ages. The CACFP Meal Patterns reflect this by varying the components and minimum food amounts required by age groups.

What are the age groups used for CACFP Meal Patterns? The Infant CACFP Meal Pattern is designed for infants less than 1 year of age and is divided into the following groups:

Ages Birth to 3 months
Ages 4 months through 7 months
Ages 8 months through 11 months

The CACFP Meal Pattern for children ages 1 through 12 is divided into the following groups:

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

Each age group has specific minimum quantities listed. CACFP Meal Patterns are accessible online at www.fns.usda.gov. Check with your state agency or sponsor for additional information and guidance on following the CACFP Meal Patterns for infants and children.

Sources

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