

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Infant Meal Pattern Age Groups

Compliance | CACFP Meal Pattern

Purpose: This handout addresses the infant meal pattern and the two age groups.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program infant meal pattern features two age groups: birth through the end of 5 months and six months through the end of 11 months. These two age groups focus on feeding infants what they need for optimal growth and development in five ways.

Encourages Breastfeeding

Both age groups promote breastfeeding. Breastmilk is the optimal source of nutrients. Generally, it is the only source of nutrients for healthy growth and development during the first six months of life. Breastmilk or infant formula is the only required food component for infants after birth through the end of five months of age for all meals and snacks.

Promotes Developmental Readiness

Another advantage of having two age groups is to help delay the introduction of solids foods until around six months. Introducing solids foods before they are developmentally ready increases their risk of being overweight or obese later in life. Also, infants need time to develop the necessary skills for eating solid goods. Most are not ready until halfway through the first year.

Allows More Nutritious Foods

The two age groups also allow more nutritious foods. Around six months, when an infant is developmentally ready to eat solid foods, you may introduce them from all the food components. During breakfast, lunch, and supper meals, the following three food components must be offered to infants:

- Breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula
- Infant cereal, meat/meat alternate, or a combination
- Vegetable, fruit, or a combination

During snacks, there are three food components:

- Breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula
- Grains
- Vegetable, fruit, or a combination

Focuses on Serving Sizes

Infants should be served just what they need. Besides breastmilk and infant formula, the serving sizes for all food components for both meals and snacks begin with “zero” for infants six through 11 months. This serving size recognizes that not all infants are ready to eat solid foods right at six months of age and may need additional time before they are developmentally ready. It also allows you to serve meals consistent with the infant’s eating habits. As long as these meals align with developmental readiness, the meals are reimbursable. By seven or eight months of age, most infants should be able to consume solid foods from all food groups.

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Focuses on Eating Habits

The two age groups focus on infants' eating habits. The serving sizes allow you to feed infants based on their eating habits with the understanding that they may change. For example, some infants may eat certain food(s) this week, but will not eat the same food(s) the next. This meal should not be disallowed, as long as you offer meals consistent with the infants' eating habits.

Keep these five key ways in mind to ensure you meet their nutritional needs.

References

- Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.
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- World Health Organization. (2018). *Session 1: The importance of infant and young child feeding and recommended practices* [Report]. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK148967/

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