

# GRAB AND GO LESSON

## The Basics of the Meats/Meat Alternates Component

Compliance | CACFP Meal Pattern

**Purpose:** This handout provides the basic factors of the meats/meat alternates component for children in the CACFP.

Meats/meat alternates provide protein, iron, B vitamins, and other nutrients. The protein found in these foods serves as the building blocks for muscles, bones, skin, and blood.

### Meats/Meat Alternates

- Meat options include lean meat, poultry, or fish.
- The creditable quantity of meats/meat alternates must be the edible portion.
- Meat alternates such as cheese, eggs, yogurt, and nut butters may be used to meet all or a portion of the component.

### Tofu and Soy Products

- Commercial tofu may be used to meet all or a portion of the component as long as it follows FNS guidance.
- Noncommercial and nonstandardized tofu and soy products are not creditable.
- Commercial tofu must be easily recognized as a meat alternate. It also must contain 5 grams of protein per 2.2 ounces (1/4 cup) to equal 1 ounce of the meat/meat alternate.

### Yogurt

- Yogurt may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened.
- Yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces.
- Noncommercial or non-standardized yogurt products are not creditable food items. Some common examples include frozen yogurt, drinkable yogurt products, homemade yogurt, or yogurt bars.

### Beans, Peas, and Lentils

- Cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils may be used to meet all or part of the component.
- Beans, peas, and lentils may be credited as a meat/meat alternate or as a vegetable, but not as both in the same meal.

### Nuts, Seeds, and Nut Butters

- Operators can offer nuts and seeds to meet the full meats/meat alternates component or use them for only part of the component, paired with another meat/meat alternate.
- Nuts and seeds meet the full meats/meat alternates expanding vegetarian and vegan options. These meals may include nuts, seeds, and nut and seed butters to meet the full meats/meat alternates. There are no limits on how often nuts and seeds may be served per week.
- Nut and seed meal or flour may be used only if they meet the requirements for alternate protein products.
- Acorns, chestnuts, and coconuts are non-creditable meat alternates because of their low protein and iron content.

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### References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2024). *Final Rule - Child Nutrition Programs: Meal patterns consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524>

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