

GRAB AND GO LESSON

CACFP Food Component Basics

Compliance | CACFP Meal Pattern

Purpose: This handout provides requirements for each of the five food components for child meals.

The meal patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) help to make menu planning easier. Use them to plan well-balanced meals that meet children's nutrient and energy needs.

The meal pattern has three features:

- Groups food into five components
- Lists the components to serve at each meal and snack
- Specifies the minimum serving sizes for each component based on age ranges

The Food Components

The CACFP meal patterns are based on five food components or groups of food. These food components provide children with the nutrition needed for healthy growth and development.

Milk (Fluid)

Note: Only fluid milk can be served to meet this component requirement.

- Serve expressed milk or allow mothers to breastfeed their infants on-site to children of any age.
- Serve unflavored whole milk to children 1–2 years old.
- Serve children 2–5 years, unflavored low-fat (1%), or unflavored fat-free (skim) milk.
- Serve children six and older unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk, or flavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk.
- A one-month transition period is allowed to switch from whole milk to low-fat or fat-free milk when a child turns two years old. Meals served to children 24–25 months old that contain whole or reduced-fat (2%) milk may be claimed for reimbursement.
- Choose from low-fat or fat-free milk, fat-free or low-fat lactose-reduced milk, fat-free or low-fat lactose-free milk, fat-free or low-fat buttermilk, or fat-free acidified milk.
- Milk must be pasteurized and meet the State and local standards.

Vegetables

- Vegetables may be served fresh, frozen, canned, or pasteurized, 100% vegetable juice.
- Pasteurized, full-strength, 100% vegetable juice (or fruit juice) may be served at only one meal, including snacks, per day.
- Cooked dry beans and peas may credit as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate but not as both in the same meal.
- A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different types of vegetables must be served.
- When crediting vegetables, they are credited based on volume, except 1 cup raw leafy greens credits as ½ cup vegetable.

Fruits

- Fruits may be served fresh, frozen, canned, dried, or as 100% pasteurized juice.
- Pasteurized, full-strength, 100% fruit juice (or vegetable juice) may be served at one meal, including snack meals, per day.
- When crediting fruits, they are credited based on volume, except ¼ cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit.

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Grains

- All grains served must be fortified, enriched, or whole-grain-rich.
- At least one serving of grains per day must be whole-grain-rich. Whole-grain-rich foods are those that contain 100% whole-grains, or at least 50% whole-grains and the remaining grains in the food are enriched.
- Breakfast cereals include ready-to-eat, instant, and regular hot cereals. They must contain less than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce (no more than 21.2 grams of total sugars per 100 grams of dry cereal). Breakfast cereals must also be enriched, fortified, or whole-grain-rich.
- Grain-based desserts do not count toward the grain requirement. Some common examples of grain-based desserts include cakes, cookies, and crust of sweet pies.

Meats/Meat Alternates

- Meat options include lean meat, poultry, or fish. Meat alternates include cheese, eggs, yogurt, and nut butters. Both types can be used to meet all or a portion of the meats/meat alternates component.
- The creditable quantity of meats/meat alternates must be the edible portion.
- Commercial tofu may be used to meet all or part of the meats/meat alternates component following FNS guidance. However, non-commercial and non-standardized tofu and soy products are not creditable. Commercial tofu must contain 5 grams of protein per 2.2 ounces ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) to equal 1 ounce of the meat/meat alternate.
- For lunch and supper, nuts and seeds may be used to meet half ($\frac{1}{2}$) of the meats/meat alternates component. They must be combined with other meats/meat alternates to meet the full requirement for a reimbursable meal.
- Yogurt may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened, and it must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces.

References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Nutrition standards for CACFP meals and snacks*. www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks

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