

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Selecting Grains for Good Health

Nutrition and Meal Management |
Nutrition Needs

Purpose: This handout provides ways to serve a variety of grains on the child care menu.

Active, growing children have high-energy needs, and a great source of energy is grains. Grains provide energy from complex carbohydrates. When children eat a balanced diet filled with whole-grains, the brain uses what it needs for energy and stores the remaining amount for later use.

Whole and enriched or fortified grains provide iron and some B vitamins such as thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin. The grain group includes many foods, such as whole-grain or enriched rice, cereal, pasta, breads, and bread products, such as waffles, muffins, and crackers.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern requires that grains must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour. At least one whole-grain must be whole-grain-rich each day in child care settings. At least one serving of grains must be 100% whole-grain, or at least 50% whole-grain and the remaining grains are enriched.

Grain-Based Desserts

Grain-based desserts are also addressed in the CACFP meal pattern. These items are significant sources of added sugars and saturated fats. Eating too much sugar and saturated fat may increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other chronic illnesses. Therefore, grain-based desserts are not creditable items in the CACFP.

Common grain-based desserts include:

- Breakfast bars
- Brownie
- Cake
- Cereal bars
- Cookies
- Doughnuts
- Granola bars
- Crusts of sweet pies
- Sweet rolls
- Toaster pastries

Tips for Great Grain Choices

There are many options for selecting grains for good health. Keep these tips in mind as you choose grains for your child care setting.

Make half of your grains whole-grain:

- Offer whole-grain bread products more often.
- Look for the words whole-grain, whole-wheat, brown rice, or other whole-grain terms in the ingredient listing on the product label.

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Vary grain choices:

- Rice, cereals, and pasta are popular grain foods with young children.
- Add cooked barley to soup.
- Mix brown rice and white rice in casseroles.
- Make a mixed-grain pilaf with barley, wheat berries, and brown rice. Tip: Cook the grains in advance and freeze in recipe-size portions.
- Try quinoa (keen-wah) cooked in a low-sodium chicken broth.
- Use whole-wheat flour or whole-wheat pastry flour for part of the all-purpose flour in baked goods.
- Use whole-wheat and white enriched elbow macaroni to make macaroni and cheese.

Reduce fat, salt, and sugar in grains:

- Use whole-grain breads and serve plain or with a light spread of jelly or jam instead of margarine or butter.
- Serve pasta, noodles, brown rice, and white rice cooked with a low-sodium broth or seasoned with mild herbs and spices. Avoid heavy sauces with lots of fat, such as cream sauce.
- Limit the use of higher-fat bread products like doughnuts, sweet rolls, and pastries.
- Choose low-fat, whole-grain crackers.
- Sweeten oatmeal and other cooked cereals with dried fruit.

For more information on serving a variety of grains on your menu that meets the CACFP meal pattern requirements, contact your State agency or sponsoring organizations.

References

- Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). *CACFP 16-2017: Grain-Based Desserts in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/grain-based-desserts-child-and-adult-care-food-program>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*. www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program

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