

# Adult Day Care Food Allergy Fact Sheet



## Common Questions: Adult Day Care Directors

### Is an adult day care site operating the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) required to make modifications for participants with food allergies?

Yes. Adult day care sites operating the CACFP or receiving other Federal funds are required to make reasonable modifications for participants with food-related disabilities such as food allergies or other health concerns. A food allergy may be considered a disability whether it is life threatening or not. Meal modifications may require meals that are outside of the meal pattern. These meals are reimbursable if there is a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian on file documenting the necessary modifications. A State licensed healthcare professional is an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law. All CACFP programs are required to accept medical statements from registered dietitians by October 1, 2025.

Sites may accommodate food-related disabilities within the meal pattern requirements without a signed medical statement. Adult day care sites may be able to accommodate a food allergy using Offer Versus Serve (OVS) to substitute an allergen-containing food with one of similar nutrient composition at a meal. Note: OVS is not a meal service option at snack.

### Is an adult day care site required to make modifications for participants with food-related disabilities that are not food allergies?

Yes. Adult day care sites are required to make reasonable modifications for participants with other food-related disabilities (e.g., food intolerance, celiac disease, and diabetes). Meal modifications outside of the meal pattern require a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian to be reimbursable. Additionally, sites may accommodate other medical or food-related disabilities within the meal pattern requirements without a signed medical statement.

### Is an adult day care site required to make modifications for participants who have special dietary needs based on cultural or religious preference?

No. However, adult day care sites are strongly encouraged to meet participant's special dietary needs based on cultural, religious, or other preferences. These needs can often be met within the CACFP meal pattern (i.e., substituting another meat/meat alternate for pork). Substitutions of fluid milk do not require a medical statement or disability if the substitution is nutritionally equivalent to milk.



### Why is documentation required for participants with food allergies?

Documentation is required to receive reimbursement for meals that do not follow the required meal pattern. A medical statement fulfills the required documentation, as it prescribes the necessary modifications needed to keep participants with food allergies safe and justifies service of foods outside of the meal pattern.

### What documentation is needed to make modifications for a participant with food allergies?

If the requirements of the meal pattern are not met when accommodating a participant's food allergies, then a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional is required.

The medical statement must include:

1. A clear description of the participant's physical or mental impairment that explains how the disability restricts the participant's diet (i.e., staff should be able to know the participant's food allergy(s) and what allergic reactions they have)
2. An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the participant's disability
3. The food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives (i.e., a substitution or modified meal)

Contact your CACFP State agency or sponsor if you need an example of a medical statement form. Adult day care administrators are encouraged to make the process of requesting a meal modification as simple and straightforward as possible. For example, administrators are encouraged to include information about meal modifications during enrollment and orientation.

If a meal modification for a participant's disability can be made within the program meal pattern, the US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, FNS) does not require a medical statement. Check with your State agency or sponsor before changing any policies as they may still require a medical statement. It is also best practice to document what procedures and processes are in place to protect the participant from allergen exposure.



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### To what length must adult day care sites go to accommodate a participant with a food allergy?

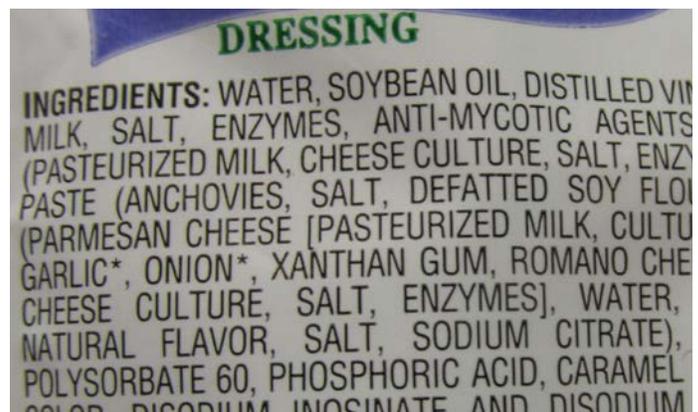
Since a participant's documented food allergy is considered a disability, an adult day care site must make reasonable modifications. This includes, but is not limited to, procedures such as providing an allergen-free meal along with a safe environment for consuming the meals. The staff must work closely with the participating adult, family, caregiver, or guardian to determine how best to meet the participant's dietary needs.

### If making substitutions for participants with food allergies costs extra money, where can additional funding be found?

A site cannot charge a participant with food allergies more than it charges other participants. Expenses to accommodate a food allergy are an allowable expense. Extra expenses can be minimized by choosing an allergen-free menu from the items already being offered. If asked to provide an expensive food item, have a discussion with the participating adult, family, caregiver, or guardian first to talk about alternatives. Sites are not required to make exact substitutions or modifications (i.e., specific brand names) if another reasonable modification is available (i.e., store brand) that effectively accommodates the disability and provides equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from the program.

### Can websites be used to check food labels for allergens?

Although labeling information posted on websites can be helpful, the information may not be up to date. To make sure a product is safe, read the ingredient list each time it is received and call the manufacturer if you have questions.



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### References

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2017). *Modifications to accommodate disabilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program.*

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/modifications-accommodate-disabilities-cacfp-and-sfsp>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2024, April 25). *Final rule - Child nutrition programs: Meal patterns consistent with the 2020-2025 DGAs.* <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2018). *What you need to know about food allergies.*

<https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/what-you-need-know-about-food-allergies>

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<https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights/usda-nondiscrimination-statement-other-fns-programs>

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