

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Seasonal Berries of Spring and Summer

As you likely know by now, the updated CACFP meal patterns for infants, who are developmentally ready, children, and adults have separate fruit and vegetable components. This requirement was established to help increase the variety of fruits and vegetables served and consumed by children and adults, in an effort to create healthy eating habits. Since it is spring and we are quickly approaching summer, let us discover various seasonal berries that can easily be incorporated in your menus. In this month's *Mealtime Memo*, we will also discuss proper storage recommendations of berries, various preparation methods, and ways to involve children in growing berries.



Berries, Berries, and More Berries

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (2018), young children should eat three meals and at least two snacks per day. Child care providers are always looking for ways to add variety to meals and snacks. The updated meal pattern provides a way to offer more fruits and vegetables. Providing smoothies is an easy way to include more fresh fruits and vegetables to children in your care. Berries are a great way to add variety to meals and snacks for children and adults. Some common seasonal berries include:

Blackberries—an excellent source of vitamin C and fiber

Blueberries—a good source of vitamin C and dietary fiber

Boysenberries—excellent source of fiber, folate, and manganese as well as a good source of vitamin K

Raspberries—high in vitamin C, high in fiber

Strawberries—high in vitamin C



Warning: Do not give whole berries or whole pieces of fruit to children due to it possibly becoming a choking hazard. Instead, cut in to small pieces or blend the fruit to make a smoothie and make it easier for young children to eat.

Fruit is commonly available at most grocery stores, farmer's markets, or possibly even the store or market where you usually shop. Regardless of where you buy it, always check the product to make sure it:

- looks good,
- has no mold or mildew,
- has good color, and
- is firm and plump.



Storage Recommendations

Store perishable fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as precut produce, in the refrigerator at a temperature of 40 °F or below. Keep produce separate from meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs in shopping carts and bags. Keep produce and other ready-to-eat foods in a separate area of the refrigerator from meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs.

Preparation Tips

Berries should be rinsed just prior to eating them. In addition, as they may be a choking hazard for young children, blend or change their shape and texture before serving them. If a small fruit or berry has any of the following characteristics, be sure to cut it up before offering to young children.

- round
- tube-shaped
- small
- hard
- thick and sticky
- smooth
- slippery
- easily molded to the airway

Children can just eat the changed berries or can add them to anything they want, whether it be cereal or a smoothie. You can also freeze berries by spreading them on a baking sheet and putting in the freezer. Once frozen you can put the berries in a freezer-safe storage container and store in the freezer for no longer than one year. You should be able to use the berries for making smoothies and other items. Try putting frozen or slightly thawed berries in the blender and add milk and water. If by chance the berries do not smell and/or look good, it is best that you throw them away.

Keep in mind that berries and other frozen food may lose its quality after a period of time. If the freezer door is opened often, it may have an effect on how frozen the food stays.

Growing Berries

If possible, allow children to see the different stages of a berry growing. You can do this by showing them pictures or growing a berry plant, like a strawberry, in a container. This allows the children to see where the fruit comes from and may help them become more interested in eating them.

Fruits offer many health benefits for children (and adults). In addition, consuming them is part of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Not only do they provide dietary fiber and vitamin C, berries are free of:

- fats, including saturated fats,
- sodium, and
- cholesterol.

Berries are great fruits that supply many nutrients the body needs without the sodium, fat, or extra calories. You can splurge on eating fruits you like and love. The fresh berries will also provide a feeling of being full.

Please see the smoothie recipe below. Refer to USDA Memo CACFP 05-2014 (v.3) regarding Use of Smoothies in Child Nutrition Programs and Crediting of Fruits and Specific Vegetables.

Very Berry Smoothie

This refreshing pineapple, banana and berry blend smoothie has 2 and ½ cups of fruit per serving.

Ingredients

- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 cup frozen raspberries
- 1 cup pineapple chunks
- 1 banana
- 1 cup skim milk (or almond milk)
- 1 ½ cups ice

Directions

1. Peel and slice the banana.
2. Gather all ingredients and combine in a blender.
3. Cover and blend until smooth.
4. Serve right away or pour into ice cube trays and freeze. During the week, pop out the cubes for a quick on-the-go breakfast.

Note

Get an additional food group in your smoothie by adding 1 cup of spinach or kale.

Source: USDA What's Cooking? <https://whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/fruit-smoothie>



References

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