

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Snacks for a Balanced Nutrition

Nutrition and Meal Management | Menu
Planning

Purpose: This handout provides good practices for incorporating nutritious snacks into the child care program.

Snacks play an important role during the early years, especially in a child care setting. Due to their smaller stomachs, young children are typically unable to eat enough food during breakfast, lunch, and supper to meet their nutritional needs.

Incorporating snacks throughout the day helps manage hunger needs in between meals. Serving young children snacks can also help to provide the nutrients and energy needed for healthy growth and development.

Young children need to eat every two to three hours throughout the day. The hours that children are in your care will determine the time of day and the number of snacks to serve. Always plan snack times to ensure that children are ready to eat, allowing at least 2 hours between meals and snacks. For example, your facility operates between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. If the children eat breakfast at 8:00 a.m. and lunch at 11:00 a.m., there may not be enough time to serve a mid-morning snack; however, an afternoon snack is ideal for this timeframe. When planning afternoon snacks, think about the time that most children will eat supper at home. Serve afternoon snacks later in the day so that children will not be hungry too early in the evening as their families prepare meals after work.

CACFP Snack Meal Patterns and Serving Sizes per Age Group

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Supplement (Snack) Meal Pattern requires that at least two different components be served for a reimbursable snack. The two components are chosen from milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates. For example, you could serve a fruit and a meat/meat alternate, or a grain and a milk. Serve all food components in the minimum serving sizes as outlined in the chart following (select two of the five components for a reimbursable snack).

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Snack Meal Pattern			
Food Components & Food Items	Ages 1–2	Ages 3–5	Ages 6–12
Fluid milk	4 fluid ounce	4 fluid ounce	8 fluid ounce
Lean meat, poultry, or fish	½ ounce	½ ounce	1 ounce
Tofu, soy product, or alternate protein products	½ ounce	½ ounce	1 ounce
Cheese	½ ounce	½ ounce	1 ounce
Large egg	½	½	½
Cooked dry beans or peas	⅛ cup	⅛ cup	¼ cup
Peanut butter, soy nut butter, or other nut or seed butters	1 tbsp	1 tbsp	2 tbsp
Yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened	2 ounces or ¼ cup	2 ounces or ¼ cup	4 ounces or cup
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds	½ ounce	½ ounce	1 ounce
Vegetables	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup
Fruits	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup
Grains (oz eq)			
Whole-grain-rich or enriched bread	½ ounce equivalent	½ ounce equivalent	1 ounce equivalent
Whole-grain-rich or enriched bread product, such as biscuit, roll, or muffin	½ ounce equivalent	½ ounce equivalent	1 ounce equivalent
Whole-grain-rich, enriched, or fortified cooked breakfast cereal grain, or pasta	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
Whole-grain-rich, enriched, or fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (dry, cold)			
Flakes or rounds	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup
Puffed cereal	¾ cup	¾ cup	1¼ cup
Granola	⅛ cup	⅛ cup	¼ cup

The Snack Meal Pattern allows only one of the components to be a beverage (milk or juice). Children's small stomachs cannot hold a large amount of liquid. Milk and juice served together as the two snack items would not be reimbursable even though they are from different components. Milk with whole-grain cereal is a good snack choice.

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Beverages

Children need water often during the day, and snack time is a perfect time to offer water. Serve water for snacks when the two foods planned do not include a beverage. For example, crackers, cheese, and water is a good snack choice. Remember, water does not meet a component requirement, but it does satisfy a child's thirst. Water should be offered and made available during all snacks and meals. Water may not be served in place of fluid milk.

Snack Ideas

- Fresh fruits and vegetables cut in bite-sized pieces are good finger foods for children old enough to chew them.
- Small cereal pieces and soft-cooked foods are good choices for very young children.
- Offer dips with pieces of fruit and vegetables for dipping. Use yogurt or hummus as a base to make dips.
- Fill a small ice cream cone with yogurt. Decorate with small pieces of soft, fresh fruit.
- Make a fun fruit salad from half of a pear or peach.
- Serve nontraditional items as snacks, such as a half sandwich, a small bowl of soup, or a pasta salad. You could introduce a new recipe that you are considering as a lunch entree.
- Use favorite breakfast items, such as muffins or baked French toast as snacks.
- Pita or pocket bread can be used at snack time to hold small salads or sandwich fillings.
- For children over four years old, try a tortilla roll-up. Spread low-fat cream cheese on a small flour tortilla. Then, sprinkle with grated carrot and a few raisins. Roll up and cut in small rounds.
- Use snacks as a taste test to let children try new foods. For example, to introduce a new vegetable such as broccoli, include it with an old favorite such as skinny carrot sticks. Serve with a yogurt dip. Talk about new food. How is it grown? Why is it healthy to eat? How does it taste? How does it look?

References

U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp>

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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