



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Nutritious Foods for Infants

Good nutrition is one of the most important components of healthy growth and development during the first year. Most infants double their birth weight by six months and triple their birth weight by one year. Therefore, they need good sources of essential nutrients, such as breastmilk and other nutritious foods for healthy growth and development.

Recently, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) updated the infant meal pattern to reflect two age groups instead of three, effective October 1, 2017: birth through five months and six through eleven months. One key reason for this change is linked to the benefits of breastmilk. Breastmilk is the optimal source of nutrients for infants, and it is generally the only source of nutrients infants need for healthy growth and development during the first six months of life. For those reasons, breastmilk, along with iron-fortified formula, is the only required food component for infants between the ages of birth through the end of five months.



To better support the feeding of breastmilk to infants, the updated infant meal pattern requirements encourage and promote breastfeeding in two key ways. First, you may continue to claim infant meals for reimbursement when a parent or guardian supplies expressed breastmilk (milk that is produced and expelled from the breast) for their infant, and you feed the milk to the infant. This requirement is currently in effect for infant meals. Second, you may begin to claim reimbursement for meals when a mother breastfeeds her infant at the child care facility.

Midway through the first 12 months of life, most infants are developmentally ready for solid foods. Introducing solid foods too early may cause infants to choke on the food because they are not physically able to consume solid foods. In addition, infants may consume less breastmilk or formula and not get enough calories and other nutrients for proper growth and development when they are offered solid foods too early. Therefore, the updated meal pattern allow for solid food to be introduced around or after six months when they are developmentally ready.





According to the *American Academy of Pediatrics* (AAP), there is no direct signal to determine when an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods. However, the AAP provides these guidelines. When an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods, the infant:

- sits in a high chair, feeding seat, or infant seat with good head control;
- opens their mouth when food comes their way. The infant may watch others eat, reach for food, and seem eager to be fed;
- moves food from a spoon into the mouth; and
- doubles in weight.

One of the most important factors for introducing solid foods to infants is communication with parents and guardians. Always consult with parents or guardians about when and what solid foods to introduce to infants. When communicating with parents and guardians, you may wish to use the AAP's developmental readiness guidelines as a way to show the infant may be ready for solid foods. Remember, all infants mature differently at different ages. Therefore, some infants will require longer than others to become developmentally ready to accept solid foods. However, by seven or eight months, most infants should be consuming solid foods from all food components.

Once an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods, you must offer the food(s) to the infant. Begin by gradually introducing solid foods, one at a time, and over the course of a few days. During this phase, you may find it appropriate to offer solid foods at only one meal per day. An infant does not need to be offered a solid food component that is a part of the meal pattern, such as vegetables and fruit, until the infant has established a tolerance for that food component.

To allow for more nutritious foods in an infant's diet, you may serve foods from all of the food components around 6 months, as it is developmentally appropriate. Specifically, infant cereal, vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, poultry, whole eggs, cooked dry beans or peas, cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, or a combination of the above are all options for infants meals and snacks. However, fruit or vegetable juices may not be served to infants. For additional information on serving infants meals and snacks, refer to the USDA CACFP 06-2017 memo titled *Feeding Infants and Meal Pattern Requirements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*; Questions and Answers.

References

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