



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

### Veggies, Yum! Providing Opportunities for Children to Like and Try Vegetables

Vegetables are among the most nutritious foods for young children. These colorful and curiously shaped foods provide essential nutrients, young children need for healthy growth and development. However, most children do not eat the recommended amount of vegetables for several reasons; one in particular focuses on taste. Most young children have a natural liking for sweet and salty tastes and reject those foods with bitter and sour tastes. Although most vegetables naturally taste bitter, young children can grow to like and even love a variety of vegetables through regular opportunities of trying them.

Fortunately, there are unlimited opportunities to introduce young children to vegetables that will help them to develop a liking for variety of different types. One way points to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) updated meal patterns. Beginning October 1, 2017, operators will have the opportunity to serve children more vegetables in child care settings. For example, the updated meal patterns separate the fruit and the vegetable component at lunch and supper for meals served to preschoolers. Because of this update, child care providers can serve a fruit and a vegetable at lunch and supper or two vegetables at lunch and supper, substituting the fruit component with a vegetable. This change helps providers plan menus that feature more variety, as well provide young children with more opportunities to experience a variety of vegetables. See the following Sample Daily Menu chart to gain a better idea of what a menu might look like when planning to serve two vegetables.

Sample Daily Menu		
Required Components	Sample Menu, Fruit and Vegetables (Age 3-5)	Sample Menu, Two Vegetables (Age 3-5)
Meat/meat alternates	1.5 oz. chicken salad	1.5 oz. chicken salad
Vegetables	¼ cup broccoli	¼ cup broccoli
Fruit	¼ cup diced peaches	¼ cup carrots
Grain	½ whole wheat pita	½ whole wheat pita
Milk	¾ cup unflavored, low-fat milk	¾ cup unflavored, low-fat milk



There are two important guidelines to remember when substituting the fruit component with a vegetable during lunch or supper. First, the substituted vegetable must be at least the same serving size as the fruit it replaced. For example, if you are serving carrots in the place of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of diced peaches, you must serve  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of carrots because this is the same serving size as the diced peaches. Second, the vegetables must be two different types. For example, if you serve two servings of carrots, this combination would not credit, as it is not two different types of vegetables. However, if you serve carrots and broccoli, this combination would credit because it is two different types of vegetables. For additional information on the updated meal pattern requirements for vegetables, refer to the USDA's *Vegetable and Fruit Requirements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program; Questions and Answers* policy memo at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/vegetable-and-fruit-requirements-child-and-adult-care-food-program-questions-and-answers>. Always refer to your State agency or Sponsoring Organization for additional information on meeting the CACFP requirements.

## Tips for Serving Vegetables

Keep these tips in mind to help children have happy and positive mealtime experiences while trying new vegetables.

- Purchase vegetables when in season, as they taste better and cost less.
- Allow children to help prepare vegetables, such as preparing their own salad or by making a sandwich wrap using leafy greens.
- Serve vegetables in different ways, such as raw or cooked.
- Serve one new vegetable at a time. Too many new foods at one time may cause children to resist the new foods.
- Continue to offer the new vegetable to children even if they refuse it. Many young children need at least 10-15 opportunities to try a new food before they develop a preference for them.

As mentioned, there are many opportunities to help children develop a preference for a variety of vegetables, such as using the CACFP to serve more vegetables during meals. Remember that young children form healthy eating habits that include a variety of nutritious foods, such as vegetables, when they have opportunities to try new foods. If you need additional information or other ideas, always remember the ICN's Helpdesk team is here to assist you in your success. You can reach the team at 800-321-3054 or [helpdesk@theicn.org](mailto:helpdesk@theicn.org).

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