Understanding the Meat Alternate Component

Child Care Programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) are required to have a meat or meat alternate component as a part of a meal in order to be considered a reimbursable meal. To qualify as a reimbursable meal, a meat or meat alternate must be served in the main dish or as the main dish to make sure children get adequate protein to help them grow. Meat and meat alternates are an important aspect of any meal served because they provide essential nutrients. This food component typically provides appropriate amounts of protein, iron, and B vitamins including niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, and other important nutrients. These nutrients are important for energy, growth, and the formation of body tissues. When meat is not used as the source of these nutrients, it is important to serve the appropriate meat alternates.

Some meat alternates include:
- eggs,
- cheese,
- low-fat yogurt,
- beans and peas, and
- nuts or nut butters.

Understanding the Meat Alternate Component continued on page 2
Understanding the Meat Alternate Component


When incorporating meat alternates into the menu, it is important to make sure it is a complete protein source because they are necessary for the body to function properly. So, what does it mean to be a complete protein source? It means that the menu item or the meal is made up of all the essential amino acids, which are the smallest forms of a protein. Animal sources of protein naturally contain complete amino acids with a few exceptions including many meat alternates. Cheese is an example of a meat alternate that provides complete protein. Other examples of complete proteins include eggs, low-fat milk, and other dairy products.

If a meat alternate is not a complete source of amino acids, it can be combined with another food to become a complete source. This combination is often referred to as a complementary protein. Some examples include pairing grains with legumes or grains with dairy. For instance, when beans and corn are incorporated into a menu item, it is a complete source of protein.

The meat portion can be the most expensive part of the meal cost. Using meat alternates can be a cost effective and healthy solution. Dry beans, for example, are high in protein and are inexpensive which make them a good option. Using meat alternates throughout a menu cycle can benefit food cost, while providing optimal nutrition for the meals served.
Did you know ice is considered a food? According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), packaged ice is classified and regulated as a food. Ice manufacturers are required to apply the same measures of sanitation as other food manufactures when producing, holding, and transporting ice. The FDA requires all packaged ice have labels that list the manufacturer’s name and place of business, the packer, or the distributor of the ice. Ice manufacturers are also required to list the exact source of water, such as artesian well water or spring water. The FDA does not inspect food service establishments or retail stores who package and sell ice for direct use; however, they are still required to follow their state and local authority’s regulations regarding ice.

As a child care provider, you may find it necessary to purchase packaged ice for nutrition activities, cooling warm beverages, or keeping foods cool until served. Remember to keep safety in mind when using ice. Always use a NSF approved ice scoop for handling ice to ensure you have the safest and most durable utensil for handling ice. Never use your bare hands or glassware to scoop ice, by doing this it may contaminate the ice with germs, or the glass may break and chip into the ice. For more information on packaged ice, check out FDA Regulates the Safety of Packaged Ice at http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm197586.htm

Fruit of the Month:
Sapotes

The unique fruit, sapote (sa•po•te) is sweet with a juicy and custard-like, creamy flesh. The flavor is mild and is similar to coconut, lemon, and vanilla. It is often used as an ingredient in ice cream because of its unique flavor and smooth texture. However, if picked or purchased overripe, the flavor can be bitter and unpleasant. It is a circular fruit that can range from green to yellow based on maturity. Sapotes are very nutritious being an excellent source of fiber, vitamins A, B₆, C, copper, and magnesium. They are also a good source of vitamin B₉, folate, pantothenic acid, iron, and potassium. Sapotes should be selected with no bruises or blemishes and stored at room temperature. They are grown mostly in California. Although, it is not a common fruit, it can be purchased in markets throughout the United States.

Nutrition Tip

Sugar consumption is one of the largest contributors to childhood obesity. Many food products on the market have added sugar that may not be recognizable. It is important to read food labels and ingredient lists to guarantee excess sugar is not being consumed by children.

Sugar consumption is one of the largest contributors to childhood obesity. Many food products on the market have added sugar that may not be recognizable. It is important to read food labels and ingredient lists to guarantee excess sugar is not being consumed by children.
References


