

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Nutrition Guidelines and Menu Planning



How to Use this Factsheet

This factsheet is designed to help CACFP Sponsors and Participating Sites understand nutrition guidelines and menu planning. For more information on the CACFP program and how to participate, please review the How to Participate in CACFP Factsheet, available on the **SDE CACFP website**.

CACFP meal pattern requirements were updated October 1, 2017. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Idaho State Department of Education (SDE), Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), have published many resources detailing these updated nutrition guidelines, meal patterns, and meal planning standards for CACFP sponsored meal service. These resources can be found at our **SDE CACFP website**.

The information presented below provides general guidelines for meal patterns and nutrition specific to infant and child participant standards and outlines the dietary recommendations and restrictions of different food types. Keep in mind that the required portion sizes and components of each approved meal type will vary by the child's age, and meal planning resources are available to CACFP participants via their sponsoring organization or SDE.



See the "Resources" call-out boxes throughout this factsheet for more information and guidance.

Meal Patterns

Required meal patterns vary between infants (<1 year old) and children (1-18 years old).



Infant meal patterns include the use of breastmilk or formula exclusively for zero to five month-old children, with more solid, healthy foods introduced around six months, or when the infant is developmentally ready to accept these foods.



Child meal patterns detail the requirements for servings of milk, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and meat/meat alternates.



USDA resources summarizing complete meal pattern requirements for infants and children are available on the **SDE CACFP website**



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Meal Planning Best Practices

CACFP Participating Sites should work with their Sponsor to keep up-to-date on the most current nutrition guidelines, but in general, should work to apply the following best practices when providing food to children in their care.



Overall, sites should **increase consumption of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains**, and **reduce consumption of added sugars and total fats**.



USDA recommended best practices and additional resources to support your efforts to provide healthy food to your participants is available on the [**SDE CACFP website**](#)

Meat and other Protein Sources

Lean meats, nuts, and legumes should be served preferentially, with no more than one serving of processed meat being offered each week. Natural, low-fat, or reduced-fat cheese should be served when possible.

Meat and meat alternates may be served in place of the entire grain component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week. Tofu may be served as a meat alternative to children.



Milk

Breastmilk

Sponsors should support mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants by encouraging mothers to supply breastmilk or by offering a quiet, private, and sanitary area for mothers to breastfeed their children at the Participating Site(s). Breastmilk and formula should be given exclusively to infants zero to five months of age, and it is recommended that breastmilk be given as opposed to formula during infancy whenever possible. Solid foods should be gradually introduced to infants once they are developmentally ready to accept them and facilities should start with foods that have already been introduced to the infant by the parent(s) or guardian(s).

Milk

Unflavored whole milk must be served to one year-olds; unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk to two to five years old; and unflavored low fat, unflavored fat free, or flavored fat free milk may be served to children six years or older. Please note, non-dairy milk substitutes nutritionally equivalent to cow's milk may be served in place of milk to children with a medical or special dietary need.



Grains

Whole grains are required in child meal patterns. At least one serving of grains each day must be whole grain-rich. This food is defined as at least 50% of the grain ingredients are whole grains and the remaining grains in the food are enriched, or 100% whole grain. Grain-based desserts, such as granola bars, do not count towards the grain requirement at any meal or snack.

Vegetables and Fruit

Participants should serve a variety of fruits and vegetables and serve whole fruit rather than juice whenever possible. 100% juice is limited to once per day. It is recommended that at least one of the two required components of a snack be a vegetable or fruit.



Sugar Limitations

Sugar should be limited by:

- Avoiding serving sources of added sugars, such as syrup or honey, or sugar sweetened beverages like fruit drinks or sodas. Mix-in ingredients sold with yogurts like candy or cookie pieces are not allowed to be served at CACFP centers and homes.
- Ensuring cereal does not exceed more than six grams of sugar per dry ounce and yogurt does not exceed 23 grams of sugar per six ounce serving to meet the program standards.
- Not serving grain-based desserts (i.e. cookies, brownies, cakes).