



Rhode Island Department of Education's Child & Adult Care Food Program

Meal Patterns for Children

In this presentation, we will review Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns for children. This presentation is one in a series of trainings on the nutrition program. Other presentations in the series include:

- An overview of the CACFP program, including eligibility requirements
- Appropriate meal patterns for infants and adults
- Planning healthy meals and snacks using CACFP meal patterns
- Ensuring the civil rights of children and adults participating in the CACFP

It is a goal of the CACFP to provide tasty, nutritious meals to children and adults that meet the government's dietary guidelines for Americans. This is not difficult but careful meal planning is key.

Today we will address the following:

- **What is a meal pattern?**
- **What counts as a reimbursable meal for children?**
- **Using the CACFP Meal Patterns**

But first

What does the CACFP do?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program plays a vital role in improving the quality of daycare and making it more affordable for many low-income families. CACFP provides reimbursement to participating care providers, called sponsors, for serving approved meals to children in their care. Its goal is to improve and maintain the health and diets of children through the development of good eating habits.

Sponsors can provide up to two meals and one snack, or two snacks and one meal to a child each day. **For children in emergency shelters, up to 3 meals a day may be provided.** The food choices and amounts of food in a child's meal pattern are dictated by the age of the child.



What is a meal pattern?

The CACFP meal pattern helps you plan well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks that meet children's nutrient and energy needs.

A meal pattern has two parts:

Part 1 of the CACFP meal pattern is the types of foods that are offered in meals. These foods are in four *Food Groups (or Component Food Groups)*. They are

- Fluid Milk
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Bread and Bread Alternates
- Meat and Meat Alternates

Part 2 of the Meal Pattern is the serving (or portion) size served to children. The minimum portion size must be served; the portion size varies with the age of the child.

Together, the Food Groups and the Portion sizes equal the meal pattern.

What counts as a reimbursable meal for children?

A reimbursable meal is one that meets all the meal pattern requirements of the CACFP. It has the correct meal components in the right portion sizes.

Using the CACFP Meal Patterns

Each type of meal or snack has its own meal pattern. Let's look at a child's meal patterns for breakfast, lunch **or supper** and for snacks.

Breakfast:

For children, the breakfast meal pattern includes foods from 3 of the 4 food groups:

- Milk
- Fruits and vegetables
- And bread/bread alternate

Here is more detail information on the breakfast meal pattern. This information can be printed at the end of this presentation.



The child's meal pattern consists of 3 food groups:

- 1 serving of milk
- 1 serving of fruit or vegetable
- 1 serving of bread or grains

The important thing to remember is that the serving size from each of these food groups varies with the age of the child.

As an example, let's look at the serving sizes for milk.

A one-year-old child receives $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of whole milk. Once a child turns 2 years of age, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of only low-fat or skim milk should be served.

The 3-to-5 year old child's serving is larger. It's $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of low-fat or skim milk while children 6 years and older should be served 1 cup of milk.

At a minimum, children age 12 and older must be served the amounts listed for children 6-12 years old. They may be served larger portions based on their greater food needs.

Children 1 to 2 years of age must be served whole milk.

Children 2 years of age or older must be served milk that is low-fat (1%) or non-fat (skim).

Whenever fruit or vegetable juice is offered, it must be **100%** full-strength juice.

All breads and bread alternate must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour.

Cereal must be whole-grain or enriched or fortified.

Let's see how this meal pattern is used to plan breakfast.

Shown are 2 sample breakfasts. The serving sizes are for children 3-to-5 years of age.

1 serving of milk is $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of 1% low-fat or skim milk

1 serving of bread or bread alternate varies from $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of whole grain dry cereal to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a serving of whole grain waffle

1 serving of fruit which could be $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of orange sections or sliced fresh banana



For older children, the options remain the same but the quantities increase.

The lunch or supper meal pattern is built from all four food groups:

CACFP's meal patterns regarding snacks for children offer sponsors a number of options.

There are four food groups from which to choose:

- Milk
- Fruits and/or vegetables
- Bread or a Bread Alternate
- Meat or a Meat Alternate

At lunch, a meat/meat alternate has been added to the meal pattern. A meat serving, which varies with the age of the child, consists of the edible portion of cooked lean meat or poultry or fish.

For example 1 meat serving equals 1 ounce of edible chicken for a 1-to-2 year old child.

A 3-to-5 year old child is served 1 ½ ounces of chicken and a 6 to 12 year old child receives 2 oz of chicken.

Meat alternates include a variety of nuts and seeds as well as nut butters (like peanut butter).

Reduced-fat peanut butter and other nut butters, if they do not pose a choking hazard, may be offered to a child over 1 year of age.

Nuts and seeds are choking hazards for children and should not be served to children under 3 years of age. When nuts and seeds are offered, they can only count for up to ½ of the required total meat/meat alternate serving. They must be combined with another meat/meat alternate to fulfill the lunch or supper requirement.

Yogurt may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened.

Here are two sample lunch or supper menus, based on the CACFP meal pattern:

1 serving or ¾ cup of skim or 1% low-fat milk

1 serving or 1-½ ounce of cheese in a cheese sauce, or roasted chicken



1 serving of bread or bread alternate. This could be $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of macaroni or $\frac{1}{2}$ serving of corn bread.

And 2 servings or a total of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits and/or vegetables. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each of carrots and orange slices, or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each of spinach and pear slices.

For older children, the options remain the same but the quantities increase.

CACFP's snack meal patterns for children offer a number of options.

There are four food groups from which to choose:

- Milk
- Fruits and/or vegetables
- Bread/Bread Alternate
- Meat / Meat Alternate

You can select any two of these four food groups for a reimbursable snack. Each child will receive 1 serving from each of the 2 selected food groups.

Juice may not be served when the only other food component is milk.

You can mix and match your snacks, as this sample menu shows:

The first snack is milk and a bread alternate: graham crackers.

If the child is between 1 and 2 years old they're served $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of whole milk.

Once a child turns 2, he or she would be served $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of 1% low-fat or skim milk.

The 2nd snack is a meat alternate of $\frac{1}{2}$ oz of cheese and 1 serving of a fruit – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of orange juice.

It's great to serve water with every snack, even when you're offering milk or juice as part of the snack.

Sometimes a sponsor wants to include a food that does not meet the requirements of any food groups. This is a non-creditable food, a food that cannot be counted or credited towards the meal pattern. Non-creditable foods may be served as an "extra" part of the meal but their use is discouraged; they are often higher in fat, sugar and sodium, and they add to the cost of your meals.



Examples of non-creditable foods:

- Ice cream or pudding
- Gelatin
- Fruit Punch
- Potato Chips

Want to know more?

“Meal Patterns for Children” is one in a series of presentations the Rhode Island Department of Education provides to sponsors.

We encourage you to review “Planning Healthy Meals and Snacks Using the Meal Pattern” and our other presentations:

- “What is RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program?”
- “Meal Patterns for Infants”
- “Meal Patterns for Adults”
- “Civil Rights Requirements for RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program”

Our other presentations are as follows:

- “What is RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?”
- “Meal Patterns for Infants”
- “Meal Patterns for Adults”
- “Civil Rights Requirements for RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program”