

## CACFP Meal Patterns

Nicole Patterson: I want to go ahead and just talk to you about the CACFP meal patterns, go over the CACFP meal patterns, and really go back to the basics. The first thing I want to really stress is the importance of your state agency contacts.

Please know who your state agency contact is, and please don't hesitate to reach out. Ask them questions. This could help improve your CACFP reviews and audits as well. Your CACFP state agency contacts are on your side, and they want to see you succeed. They can provide you with additional training, resources, and support as well. Also, just note that your state agency contact may reside in various state agencies, such as your State Department of Education, maybe a Department of Public Health and Human Services as well. It will vary based on your state. They can really be a great resource for a CACFP-approved recipes, meal ideas, and so on.

The information reflected that I'm going to talk about reflects the updated CACFP meal pattern requirements, which became in effect in October of 2017. These updates allow for more opportunities to increase a child's nutrition. Meals and snacks include a better variety of fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, less added sugars, less saturated fats, and they really lead to higher-quality meals served in programs through CACFP. All of this helps young children learn healthy eating habits early that they can carry on with them later on in their lives as well.

The meal pattern should be thought of as a guide to help programs build healthy meals and also balanced meals and snacks as well. The meal patterns break down breakfast, lunch, supper, and then snacks as well, and they're all broken down into required food group components, which come together to build those balanced and nutritious meals and snacks. This means that when provided all these important components, children are provided daily the energy, the nutrients that they need to grow, develop, be physically active, and so on.

Let's take a look at each of these meal pattern components just really quick in terms of the nutrition associated with it. In the milk category, milk provides good carbohydrates, a good amount of protein, calcium - super important for children and their growing bones – potassium, and then a number of vitamins and minerals, especially vitamin D and vitamin A. The meat/meat alternate component - protein. We'll see protein in that component, super important for growing and healing.

Sources of that can be beef, lean beef, lean meats in general, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, cheese, yogurt, and so on. We can also think about plant-based sources and that meat alternate as well, so beans, legumes, tofu, and so on. In vegetables, vegetables are low in calories, but they're high in dietary fibers and nutrients. Vegetables - we think of foliage. There's a lot of folates, magnesium, potassium, and a number of vitamins and minerals as well. Fruits are very similar nutritionally, but they tend to be higher in natural sugars. We want to focus more on those vegetables versus fruits, but fruits are still very important to include daily.

Lastly, grains. Grains, we think of wheat, rice, oatmeal, barley, going to be super high in those healthy dietary fibers, a number of B vitamins and minerals as well. Let's go ahead and get into some meal patterns. These are the CACFP meal patterns, and I'm going to discuss them each individually based on meal snacks and then the different age categories. You'll notice that the CACFP meal patterns are separated by age. You'll see, in green, toddlers ages 1 to 2 and, in orange, preschool-aged children ages 3 to 5. Note that children under 12 months will follow the infant meal patterns, which I'll talk about a little bit later.

This is the CACFP meal pattern for breakfast. You'll see that, again, toddlers ages 1 to 2, they have required components for milk, fruits or vegetables, and grains. For milk, the minimum requirement is half a cup or 4 fluid ounces; vegetables or fruits, 1/4 cup. This can be 1/4 cup of fruit or vegetable or portions of both as long as they meet that minimum requirement of 1/4 of a cup or quarter cup. Then for grains, half an ounce equivalent of grains. For preschool children ages 3 to 5, we see those minimum requirements increase just slightly. Milk for ages 3 to 5 will be 3/4 of a cup or roughly 6 fluid ounces.

Fruits and vegetables - half a cup total, again fruit or vegetable, half a cup, or portions of both at a minimum of half a cup. Then grains, you'll see half-ounce equivalent there as well. What's really great about breakfast is there is an option to include protein. To allow for some flexibility in the meal planning, programs can substitute a meat or meat alternate for the entire grain component at breakfast up to three times a week. Remember that 1 ounce of a meat/meat alternate is equal to 1 ounce of a grain. You're able to switch that out up to three times a week. Now we have the CACFP pattern for lunch or supper, again, separated out by age. For toddlers ages 1 to 2, you'll see all five of those meal patterns there. It is required that program serve all five of those meal patterns during lunch or supper.

For breakfast, half a cup of milk, 4 ounces. For protein, 1-ounce equivalent of protein. Vegetables, 1/8 of a cup. Fruit, 1/8 of a cup as well, and then grains, that half-ounce equivalent. Then for preschool-aged children 3 to 5, again, you'll see slightly more. Based on their growth, development, and physical activity, they'll need a little bit more. Milk - 3/4 of a cup, 6 fluid ounces. Their protein will increase a little bit to 1 and 1/2-ounce equivalent of protein. Their fruit and vegetable intake should increase as well to 1/4 cup for each of those fruits, and vegetables each, and then your grains, that half-ounce equivalent of grain as well.

Next is the CACFP pattern for snacks. Toddlers and children ages 1 to 5 all have the same meal pattern. You'll notice that the categories are just for all age groups in this one because 1 to 2 and 3 to 5 are the same. For this one, it's a little bit different. Programs are able to choose any two of the five components to be a reimbursable meal. The meal patterns are as follows. Milk, the requirement is at least half a cup, again, 4 fluid ounces. Protein - half an ounce equivalent of protein. Vegetables and fruits are each 1/2 cup each, and then the grain component is that half-an-ounce equivalent of grain. programs can choose two of the five components to provide a reimbursable snack, again, a protein and a fruit, a grain, and a vegetable, and so on.

One great resource that I want to share with you, if you haven't already started using it or gotten yourself familiar with this, is the Food Buying Guide. The Food Buying Guide is the principal resource to determine the contribution that foods make towards the meal pattern requirements for CACFP, and this can also be used for other child nutrition programs as well. This is for foods produced on-site or purchased commercially as well. This resource is essential for helping programs really decide how much food should be purchased and also how much should be served to provide those reimbursable components during meals and snacks.

The Food Buying Guide is available in a number of formats. You can get an interactive web-based tool, a mobile app, or it can be downloaded as a PDF. We've provided the link there for you to access the Food Buying Guide on the slide, and we've also provided it in your resource handout as well. Next, we have the Crediting Handbook. This is probably one of my favorite resources to go to in terms of trying to figure out how to credit items that you may be serving for your meals and snacks. This handbook is a supplementary resource to the Food Buying Guide and contains additional information on credible foods served in your programs. The link for this resource is provided on the slide, and we've also provided it for you on your resource handout.

Now for the infant meal patterns. The infant meal patterns take into consideration a baby's usual eating habits. On the slide, you can see just a quick overview of the meal patterns. Again, it's separated by the type of meal or snack, so breakfast, lunch, supper, snacks, and then we see it separated out by age of that infant as well, so birth through five months and then 6 through 11 months as well. Next, we're going to go ahead and go into those a little bit more in-depth.

The CACFP infant meal pattern, this one is for breast milk and infant formula. Again, you'll notice it's separated by age. Infants birth through five months, if it's a breakfast or lunch, those infants should be provided at least 4 to 6 fluid ounces of breast milk or formula. For a snack, same thing, 4 to 6 ounces there as well. For the older infants, ages 6 through 11 months, those amounts will increase slightly. For breakfast, lunch, and supper - again, infants 6 through 11 months - 6 to 8 fluid ounces of breast milk or formula. For a snack, those infants 6 through 11 should be served about 2 to 4 fluid ounces of breast milk or formula.

Keep in mind that infants are fed based on their hunger and satiety cues and should be fed in a similar fashion as they would be fed at home, so always consult with families so that you're feeding the infants very similar to how their regular feeding would occur. Now solid foods. Around 6 months of age, infants begin being introduced to solid foods, so this is accounted for in the CACFP infant meal patterns. For breakfast, lunch, or supper, the older infants ages 6 to 11 months can be given certain solid foods.

They can be provided or served up to half-ounce equivalent of an infant cereal or up to 4 tablespoons of a meat, fish, poultry, egg, bean, or pea type of food product. Remember, these are infants, so it would be mashed, pureed types of foods for there. Then up to 2 ounces of cheese or up to 4 ounces of cottage cheese or up to 4 ounces of or about half a cup of yogurt. Remember that a combination of the above is acceptable to provide for those infants as well.

Along with that, up to 2 tablespoons of a vegetable or fruit is also included in that infant meal pattern. We'll see similar requirements for snack.

CACFP infant meal pattern for snack again ages 6 to 11 months up to a half-ounce equivalent of bread or a quarter-ounce equivalent of crackers or a half-ounce equivalent of an infant cereal or a quarter-ounce equivalent of a ready-to-eat breakfast cereal and then along with that a fruit or vegetable, up to 2 tablespoons of a fruit or vegetable. A combination of those is acceptable as well. Some infant feeding best practices - first, I want to call out the Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program resource. This is a really great resource for all things feeding infants. I highly encourage programs to look at that resource and get used to it. It's great for a number of questions that you may have as well.

We've provided the link to that resource on the slide, and it's also included in your resource handout as well. Just some best practices for infants, when it comes to feeding, we want to encourage and support breastfeeding. This includes arrangements for mothers to breastfeed their infants comfortably, should they choose to do so. Infant formula and breast milk is fed solely to children 0 to 12 months. Children younger than 12 months should not be consuming anything like cow's milk or any other types of foods or liquids, I should say, solely that infant formula and breast milk. Next, infants, again, are fed on cue.

We're looking at those feeding and satiety cues or fullness cues, and we don't want to feed infants past their point of fullness. We want to hold infants while feeding them. We don't want to prop bottles. When it comes to including solids, we want to make a plan for safety, appropriately introducing those solids to infants. This should be always in consultation with families and the child's primary care provider as well. Remember, introducing of solids is usually done around six months, no sooner than four months without any type of written permission from the family and the primary care provider.

We also don't want to be mixing anything with infant bottles, so no cereals, fruit, fruit juices. Any of that stuff should be mixed with formula or breast milk, and then again, serving those mashed fruits and vegetables and those first foods as well. Lastly, no fruit juice for children under 12 months as well, and this is all included in the CACFP meal patterns, also. If you have any other additional questions, you can refer to that resource, Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

These are some common CACFP questions that the National Center received from that MyPeers survey that we put out in terms of questions and comments that programs have when it comes to CACFP, the first one being, why are a cheese stick, a fruit, and a milk sufficient for breakfast? If we remember going back to that meal pattern for breakfast, a cheese stick, a 1-ounce cheese stick, is equivalent to a 1-ounce meat alternate in that protein component that would be adequate for a meeting that single component. If we had a fruit, making sure that the minimum component for that or the portion for that would be a quarter cup, and then the milk served at half a cup or 4 fluid ounces in meeting the minimum meal pattern requirements for that breakfast.

While this doesn't seem like a lot - a cheese stick, a fruit, and a milk - it would be sufficient for the CACFP meal patterns, again, depending on the age of the child. That's for a child ages 1 to 2. When you're planning meals and programs or noticing that maybe a cheese stick, a fruit, and a milk is just not filling up a child for breakfast as it should, getting more creative in your planning and providing more of those foods that tap into a child's fullness a little bit more can definitely be more beneficial. The next question, can yogurt be served at breakfast as a smoothie? The answer is yes.

Yogurt may be served in a drinkable form and credited toward the meat-alternate component if you use a credible yogurt in your own standardized smoothie recipe. The yogurt has to be within those added-sugar limitations to be used in that recipe. What about milk? Can you credit milk at breakfast in a smoothie? The answer to that one is also yes. The volume of fluid milk in each portion of smoothie is credible if the smoothie contains at least 1/4 cup or 2 fluid ounces of milk, which is the minimum serving size for milk. The milk must also meet the fat standards that you're serving as well. When a smoothie contains less than the amount of milk required in the meal pattern, additional milk must be offered as well to make up for that minimum requirement of milk at breakfast.

The last question, can you provide more information on grain equivalents? Please explain and discuss the new grain-ounce equivalent requirement. I'm actually going to provide you with a number of great resources for this. Grains must now be credited using ounce equivalents in the CACFP. Ounce equivalents are important to understand and can be helpful when planning meals and snacks. This information is useful for programs wanting to use foods that they may not have used in the past, especially for experiencing these shortages of food and maybe needing to use different types of foods that we may not have used before.

Programs should become familiar with ounce equivalents to ensure the proper portions of foods are provided, and listed on this slide are various helpful resources. An easy way to ensure grains are being credited is to use the Food Buying Guide for child nutrition programs, Exhibit A in the Grains Tool. The Exhibit A Grains Tool allows users to search their grain product and enter the serving size as listed on the product label, and the tool then determines the ounce equivalent or grain bread serving for the grain product as well as the amount of the grain product to serve to obtain that specific meal pattern contribution. Super helpful there.

Programs can use grain charts. Post the grain charts in your kitchens when planning meals and snacks. I do have one of those pictured up there on the slide. It's an example of the grain chart that can be found in the USDA's resource called Using Ounce Equivalents for Grains in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. This resource is included in your resource handout that we've provided you as well. This resource provides detailed information and grain charts that can be useful to have on hand when determining the required amount to be serving during meals and snacks and most importantly, making sure that they're credible and reimbursable.