



MEALTIME MEMO

MARCH
2024

BEST PRACTICES TO IMPROVE NUTRITION IN THE CACFP



March is a month to celebrate nutrition and wellness. It is also a time to educate and bring awareness to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Programs participating in the CACFP serve nutritious foods that meet the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern requirements. This *Mealtime Memo* will provide the USDA optional best practices you can use to strengthen the nutritional quality of meals served.

USDA Optional Best Practices

Support Breastfeeding

- Encourage breastfeeding mothers to supply breastmilk for their infants while in your care.
- Offer a quiet, private area that is comfortable and sanitary for mothers who come to your program to breastfeed.

The USDA [Breastfed Babies Welcome Here!](#) resource contains communication tools you can use to let families know that breastfed babies and breastfeeding are welcome at your child care site. It includes a mother's guide, a poster, and a message graphic.



Vegetables and Fruit

- Make at least one of the two required snack components a vegetable or a fruit.
- Serve a variety of vegetables and fruits, as each type provides a different array of nutrients.
- Provide at least one serving of dark green vegetables, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas (legumes), starchy vegetables, and other vegetables weekly.
- Choose whole vegetables and fruits (fresh, canned, frozen, or dried) instead of juice. Juice lacks the fiber found in whole or cut-up vegetables and fruits.



Refer to the following resources for vegetables categorized into subgroups:

- The ICN's [Vegetable Subgroups](#) mini-poster
- Wisconsin CACFP's [Vegetable Subgroups](#) infographic

Grains

- Provide at least two servings of whole grain-rich grains per day. This is one more serving than is required in the CACFP meal pattern.
 - Whole grains offer a variety of vitamins and minerals, including magnesium, selenium, iron, zinc, B vitamins, and dietary fiber.
 - Whole-grain foods help lower the risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. The high fiber content also helps to create a feeling of fullness that can help manage weight.



Refer to the ICN's [Incorporating More Whole Grain Foods](#) resource for information on identifying whole grains and tips for including more whole grain items on menus.

Meats and Meat Alternates

- Serve only lean meats, nuts, and legumes.
 - They are good sources of protein, B vitamins, and minerals such as iron, zinc, and magnesium. These nutrients support growing muscles, strengthen the immune system, and are necessary for growth and development in children.
 - Lean cuts of meat have less saturated fat than higher fat meat.
- Limit serving processed meats to no more than one serving per week.
 - Processed meats may contain ingredients other than meat and are typically high in saturated fat and sodium (salt).
 - Examples: bologna, luncheon meats, pepperoni, bacon, and smoked turkey products



Check out USDA's [Serving Meats and Meat Alternates at Lunch and Supper](#) for help incorporating lean meats, nuts, and legumes into your menus.

Milk

- Serve only unflavored milk to all participants. Serving flavored milk is only an option for children ages six years and older.
 - If flavored milk is served to children six years and older, select flavored milk containing no more than 22 grams of sugar per 8 fluid ounces.
- Flavored milk contains added sugars, and it is recommended that all Americans reduce their consumption of added sugars.



Additional Best Practices

- Limit serving purchased pre-fried foods to no more than one serving per week.
 - Examples: fish sticks, chicken nuggets, corn dogs, fried potatoes
- Avoid serving non-creditable foods that are sources of added sugars, such as:
 - Sweet toppings (e.g., honey, jam, or syrup)
 - Mix-in ingredients sold with yogurt (e.g., honey, candy, or cookie pieces)
 - Sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., fruit drinks or sodas)
- Incorporate seasonal and locally produced foods into meals.
 - The [USDA Seasonal Produce Guide](#) can help you explore when certain produce is most often in season.
 - The [July 2023 Mealttime Memo](#) provides many examples and resources to help you incorporate seasonal produce into your menus.



Other Ways to Celebrate Nutrition and the CACFP

Two campaigns that take place in March and emphasize nutrition are National Nutrition Month® and National CACFP Week. Check out the websites below for ideas on how you can participate in fun and healthy events.



- National Nutrition Month's® 2024 theme is “Beyond the Table.” Find more information on the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) website.
- National CACFP Week is March 10-16, 2024. Go to the [National CACFP Sponsors Association](#) website for more information and to download resources to help spread awareness about the CACFP.

Menu Ideas

The following menu ideas provide a variety of foods, colors, and textures and incorporate USDA's best practices. Some recipes contain multiple food components listed in parentheses after the recipe.

Breakfast	Lunch/Supper	Snack
Oatmeal	Cheddar Cheese Cubes	Pineapple Chunks
Blueberries	Smokin' Powerhouse Chili	Edamame
1% Milk	(Vegetable, Whole Grain)	Water
	Cantaloupe Melon Balls	
	1% Milk	

Recipes



- The [Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#) has USDA-standardized recipes for child care centers and family child care homes.
- The [Child Nutrition Recipe Box: New CACFP Lunch/Supper Recipes](#) has standardized recipes per age group (3–5 and 6–18 year-olds) and for 6, 25, and 50 servings.

References

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<https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights/usda-nondiscrimination-statement-other-fns-programs>

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