



# CACFP MEAL PATTERNS

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE | FOOD AND NUTRITION DIVISION



# CACFP MEAL PATTERNS: BEST PRACTICES

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is committed to providing Texas partners in the **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** with the information needed to operate an effective program that is compliant with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations. This brochure outlines the steps contracting entities (CE) can take to meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.

For more information or technical assistance, please visit [www.SquareMeals.org/CACFPMealPattern](http://www.SquareMeals.org/CACFPMealPattern) or contact your regional Education Service Center (ESC).

## SAMPLE COMPONENT FOR SNACK FRUITS



CACFP meal patterns lay the foundation for a healthy eating pattern for children and adults in care. USDA has also developed the following optional best practices that build on the meal patterns and highlight areas where centers and day care homes may take additional steps to further improve the nutritional quality of the meals they serve.

### Infants

- Support mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants by encouraging mothers to supply breastmilk for their infants in day care and offer a quiet, private area that is comfortable and sanitary for mothers who come to the center or day care home to breastfeed.

### Vegetables and Fruits

- Make at least one of the two required components of a snack a vegetable or a fruit.
- Serve a variety of fruits and choose whole fruits (fresh, canned, dried or frozen) more often than juice.
- Provide at least one serving each of dark green vegetables, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas (legumes), starchy vegetables and other vegetables once per week.

### Grains

- Provide at least two servings of whole grain-rich grains per day.

### Meat and Meat Alternates

- Serve only lean meats, nuts and legumes.
- Limit serving processed meats to no more than one serving per week.
- Serve only natural cheeses and choose low-fat or reduced-fat cheeses.

### Milk

- Serve only unflavored milk to all participants. If fat-free flavored milk is served to children 6 years old and older, or adults, use the Nutrition Facts Label to select and serve flavored milk that contains no more than 22 grams of sugar per 8 fluid ounces, or the flavored milk with the lowest amount of sugar if flavored milk within this sugar limit is not available.
- Serve water as a beverage when serving yogurt in place of milk for adults.

*Note: The best practices reflect recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the National Academy of Medicine to further help increase participants' consumption of vegetables, fruits and whole grains, and reduce the consumption of added sugars and saturated fats.*

## IMPROVING NUTRITIONAL QUALITY

# CACFP MEAL PATTERNS: INFANT MEALS



Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns ensure participating children and adults have access to healthy, balanced meals. The infant meal patterns support breastfeeding and enhance the nutritional quality of CACFP meals for infants.

## Encourage and Support Breastfeeding

- Providers may receive reimbursement for meals containing breastmilk either provided by the mother or breastfed directly to her infant at the day care center or home;
- Only breastmilk and infant formula are served to infants 0 through 5 months old.

## Developmentally Appropriate Meals

- Features two age groups, 0 through 5 months old and 6 through 11 months old;
- Solid foods are gradually introduced around 6 months of age, as developmentally appropriate.

## More Nutritious Meals

- Requires a vegetable or fruit, or both, to be served as a snack for infants 6 through 11 months old;
- No longer allows juice or cheese food or cheese spread to be served;
- Allows ready-to-eat cereals at snack time.



	0-5 MONTHS	6-11 MONTHS
<b>Breakfast</b>	4-6 fl oz breast-milk or formula	6-8 fl oz breastmilk or formula and  0-½ oz eq iron-fortified infant cereal, 0-4 tbsp meat, fish, poultry, whole eggs, cooked dry beans or peas; or 0-2 oz cheese; or 0-4 oz (volume) cottage cheese; or 0-4 oz yogurt; or a combination* and  0-2 tbsp vegetable, fruit or both*
<b>Lunch or Supper</b>	4-6 fl oz breast-milk or formula	6-8 fl oz breastmilk or formula and  0-½ oz eq iron-fortified infant cereal, 0-4 tbsp meat, fish, poultry, whole egg, cooked dry beans or peas; or 0-2 oz cheese; or 0-4 oz (volume) cottage cheese; or 0-4 oz yogurt; or a combination* and  0-2 tbsp vegetable, fruit or both*
<b>Snack</b>	4-6 fl oz breast-milk or formula	2-4 fl oz breastmilk or formula and  0-½ oz eq bread/bread-like items; or 0-¼ oz eq crackers; or 0-½ oz eq iron-fortified infant cereal* and  0-2 tbsp vegetable, fruit or both*

\*Required when infant is developmentally ready.

All serving sizes are minimum quantities of the food components that are required to be served.

Beginning October 1, 2021 ounce equivalents will be used to determine the quantity of the creditable grain.



# CACFP MEAL PATTERNS: CHILD AND ADULT



The CACFP meal patterns for participating **CHILDREN AND ADULTS** ensure those age groups have access to **healthy, balanced meals** and snacks throughout the day. The meal patterns include a variety of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and small amounts of added sugar and saturated fat.



## Greater Variety of Vegetables and Fruits

- The combined fruit and vegetable component is now a separate vegetable component and a separate fruit component for lunch and supper;
- Juice is limited to once per day, across all eating occasions.

## More Whole Grains

- At least one serving per day across all eating occasions must be whole grain-rich;
- Grain-based desserts no longer count towards the grain component;
- Ounce equivalents (oz eq) are used to determine the amount of creditable grains (starting October 1, 2021).

## More Protein Options

- Meat and meat alternates may be served in place of the entire grains component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week;
- Tofu and soy yogurt counts as a meat alternate.

## Age Appropriate Meals

- A new age group addresses the needs of older children 13 through 18 years old.

## Less Added Sugar

- Yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces;
- Breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce.

## Making Every Sip Count

- Children 1 years old must be served unflavored whole milk;
- Children 2-5 years old must be served unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk;
- Children 6 years old and older as well as adults must be served unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk or fat-free flavored milk;
- Children and adults with a medical or special dietary needs may be served non-dairy milk substitutes that are nutritionally equivalent to cow's milk without a medical statement from a state approved recognized medical authority;
- Only adults may be served yogurt in place of milk once per day and milk is optional at supper for adults only.

## Additional Improvements

- Offer versus serve is allowed for adults and at-risk afterschool programs;
- Frying is not allowed as a way of preparing foods on-site.

**SAMPLE COMPONENTS  
FOR LUNCH**  
MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE  
VEGETABLES  
GRAINS



# HEALTHY BALANCED CHILD AND ADULT MEAL PATTERNS

## Breakfast Meal Patterns

	AGES 1-2	AGES 3-5	AGES 6-12 & 13-18	ADULTS
Milk	½ cup	¾ cup	1 cup	1 cup
Vegetables, fruit, or both	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Grains	½ oz eq*	½ oz eq*	1 oz eq*	2 oz eq*

\*Meat and meat alternates may be used to substitute the entire grains component a maximum of three times per week.

oz eq = ounce equivalents

Yogurt may be used to fulfill the fluid milk requirement for adults once per day, when yogurt is not used as a meat alternate in the same meal.

## SAMPLE COMPONENT FOR SNACK FRUITS



## Lunch and Supper Meal Patterns

	AGES 1-2	AGES 3-5	AGES 6-12 & 13-18	ADULTS
Milk	½ cup	¾ cup	1 cup	1 cup*
Meat/Meat Alternates	1 oz	1 ½ oz	2 oz	2 oz
Vegetables	⅓ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Fruits	⅓ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
Grains	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq

\*A serving of milk is not required at supper meals for adults

oz eq = ounce equivalents

Yogurt may be used to fulfill the fluid milk requirement for adults once per day, when yogurt is not used as a meat alternate in the same meal.

In lieu of offering a fruit and vegetable for lunch or supper 2 vegetables may be served; however, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

## Snack Meal Patterns

	AGES 1-2	AGES 3-5	AGES 6-12 & 13-18	ADULTS
Milk	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup
Meat/Meat Alternates	½ oz	½ oz	1 oz	1 oz
Vegetables	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	½ cup
Fruits	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	½ cup
Grains	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq

Select two of the five components for snack.

oz eq = ounce equivalents


*Note: All serving sizes are minimum quantities of the food components that are required to be served.*

*Current updates to the suggested serving sizes have been updated from USDA requirements from 1969 and are effective October 1, 2017.*

*Beginning October 1, 2021 ounce equivalents will be used to determine the quantity of the creditable grain.*

## SAMPLE SNACK MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE VEGETABLES





**The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) and local Education Service Centers stand ready to provide resources and technical assistance as CACFP partners implement the meal patterns.**

**Visit [www.SquareMeals.org/CACFPMealPattern](http://www.SquareMeals.org/CACFPMealPattern) for more information from TDA and USDA.**

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1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

3. email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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