

The New CACFP Meal Pattern

Introduction

This module describes the new meal pattern for the CACFP issued by USDA Food and Nutrition Service on April 25, 2016. It announces the required compliance date along with important elements of that compliance.

Resources

- [Nutrition Standards for CACFP Meals and Snacks](#)
- [NEW CACFP Infant Meal Patterns](#) and [New Infant Meal Standard Charts](#)
- [NEW CACFP Child and Adult Meal Patterns](#), [New Children Meal Standard Charts](#), and [New Adult Meal Standard Charts](#)
- [Team Nutrition](#)

Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

[The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#) (the Act), Public Law 111-296, was signed by President Obama on December 13, 2010. The Act makes many important improvements to the Child Nutrition Programs that serve millions of children across our country each day.

The Act provides improved access to nutrition assistance through program expansion, outreach, and provisions that make it easier for children to get nutritious meals when they are away from home.

Background for the new CACFP Meal Pattern

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expanded the purpose of CACFP to ensure the program provides nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth and development of young children and the health and wellness of older adults.

With this goal in mind, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids act required USDA to update the CACFP meal patterns to better align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) and the most current nutrition science.

This is the first major revision of the CACFP meal patterns since the Program's inception in 1968!

The final rule was made public on Friday, April 22, 2016 and was officially published in the Federal Register on Monday, April 25, 2016.

The new meal patterns are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, recommendations from the National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and your public comments.

The new CACFP meal patterns are designed to ensure children and adults have access to healthy, balanced meals throughout the day.

Under the new meal patterns, young children and adults in child care will receive meals with more whole grains, a greater variety of vegetables and fruits, and less added sugars and solid fats. In addition,

the new infant meal patterns support breastfeeding mothers and increased consumption of vegetables and fruits.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) focused on incremental changes that balance the science behind the nutritional needs of the diverse CACFP child and adult participants and the practical abilities of the diverse centers and day care homes to implement the changes.

Compliance Date



Compliance with the new CACFP Meal Pattern is required for all State agencies and CACFP-participating institutions and facilities nationwide on October 1, 2017. This compliance date applies to all of Montana's child care centers, Day Care Homes, Head Start Programs, afterschool programs, outside school hours' programs, adult day care centers and emergency shelters that participate in the CACFP.

The NEW CACFP Infant Meal Pattern

The final rule establishes two age groups for infants, instead of the current three age groups. The new age groups are 0 – 5 months and 6 – 11 months. These new age groups now match the infant age groups in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).



This was primarily done to encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The old meal patterns allowed solid foods to be introduced as early as 4 months of age. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics found that the introduction of solid foods prior to 4 months of age is consistently identified as contributing to later overweight and obesity.

The final rule allows solid foods to be introduced before or after six months of age, as the infant is developmentally ready. This new flexibility in the final rule allows day care providers and parents/guardians to work together to determine when and what solid foods the center or day care home should start serving. This final rule also is consistent with AAP.

Gradual Introduction of Solid Foods



The minimum serving size range for the 6 through 11-month old age group starts at zero so solid foods can be introduced gradually. The new servings size ranges also recognize that not all infants will be ready to accept solid foods at 6 months of age.

The solid foods components in the 6 through 11-month old age group is required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.

Breastfeeding

Recognizing the benefits of breastfeeding, as of the implementation date of October 1, 2017, a child care center now will be reimbursed when a mother directly breastfeeds her infant on-site or if a childcare provider feeds the child a bottle with breast milk in it.

Infant Snack

Older infants (6 through 11 months of age) must be served a vegetable or fruit when it is developmentally appropriate for the infant. A recent comprehensive study on food intakes of infants determined that a substantial proportion of infants do not consume any vegetables or fruit in a given day. This rule is a conscious effort to address that it is never too early to start building healthy habits.



Ready-to-eat cereals are now an additional grain option that can be served at the snack meal. All ready-to-eat cereals served to infants are subject to the same sugar limit as breakfast cereals served to children and adults in the CACFP. Ready-to-eat cereals served to infants at snack must contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce. Fruit juice is no longer allowed.

Meat and Meat Alternates



The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends restricting cow's milk prior to 1 year. That recommendation does not extend to cow's milk by-products, such as cheese. Rather, AAP recommends that infants should eat from all food groups by 7 or 8 months of age. Based on this recommendation, the new meal pattern allows cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt.

The current meal pattern allows cheese food and cheese spread. Those foods are not allowed under the new infant meal pattern due to their high sodium content.

The final rule also allows whole eggs to credit towards the meat/meat alternate component for infants. Previously, only egg yolks were allowed due to concerns with developing food allergies when infants are exposed to the protein in the egg white. However, recently the AAP concluded there is no convincing evidence to delay the introduction of solid foods that are considered to be major food allergens, including eggs.

The New Child and Adult Meal Pattern

Age Groups

The new meal pattern includes a new age group for children: 13 through 18 year olds. This addition better reflects the characteristics of the population CACFP serves, such as those children receiving meals at approved sites such as at-risk afterschool programs and emergency shelters.

The meal pattern requirement for the 13 through 18-year-old age group is the same as the meal pattern requirement for the 6 through 12-year-old age group. Larger serving sizes for the 13 through 18-year-old age groups are not required because the meal reimbursements remain unchanged.

FNS recognizes the importance of serving meals that meet the nutritional needs of all children participating in the CACFP. Therefore, FNS will be making recommendations via policy guidance for

servicing meals to children 13 through 18 years old that build on the meal pattern requirements to ensure that this age group's nutritional needs are met.

Vegetables and Fruits

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans found that very few children consume the recommended amount of vegetables, while the majority of young children meet the recommended intake for fruits.



The final rule separates the vegetable and fruit components at lunch, supper, and snack. This is consistent with the National School Lunch Program. Separating these components increases the variety of foods children are served and allows institutions to serve a vegetable and fruit snack.

Many comments were received in regards to serving two vegetables at lunch and supper as found in many combination dishes. If two vegetables are served, they must be two different kinds of vegetables, not two servings of one vegetable. This allowable decision helps increase the appeal of some meals and encourages further consumption of vegetables.

Juice Limitation

To help encourage and improve children and adults' consumption of whole vegetables and fruits, as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines, the new meal pattern limits juice to once per day. This expectation is feasible and is already followed by all providers to a great extent. Montana CACFP limits juice to once per week. This practice will continue to be enforced.

Grains

The final rule requires at least one grain per day to be whole grain-rich. This new whole grain-rich requirement will help children and adults increase their intake of whole grains and benefit from the important nutrients they provide.



What does whole grain-rich mean?

Whole grain-rich foods are foods that contain at least 50% whole grains and remaining grains in the food are enriched, or foods that contain 100% whole grains.

FNS will issue guidance to the State agency outlining the specific criteria for a food to be considered whole grain-rich. This will also be the same criteria the National School Lunch Program uses to maintain consistency among our programs.

Grain-based Desserts

The final rule disallows grain-based desserts because they are a source of added sugars and solid fats. Grain-based desserts are items such as cookies, cakes, sweet pie crusts, fruit turnovers, doughnuts, granola bars, toaster pastries, sweet rolls, and brownies. As of October 1, 2017, these items will no longer be allowed in a reimbursable meal. This list can be found in USDA's "Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs" Exhibit A, denoted as desserts with superscripts 3 and 4.

was found that yogurts containing no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces are widely available, many do not contain artificial sweeteners, and cost no more than other yogurts with more sugar.

Fluid Milk

Many Montana providers should be familiar with the new meal pattern milk requirements as they were originally put in place in September 2011 via a policy memorandum. The final rule puts that policy into the CACFP regulations.



For one-year-old children:

- Requires whole, unflavored milk for children 1-year-old as recommended by the National Academy of Medicine.

For two-year-old children and older:

- Must be low-fat (1%) or fat-free, unflavored milk. This is consistent with the Dietary Guidelines and the National School Lunch Program.

For adults:

- Must be low-fat or fat-free, unflavored milk. This is consistent with the Dietary Guidelines and the National School Lunch Program.
- Yogurt may be served in place of milk once per day for adults only.

Non-dairy beverages:

- Already allowed; written into regulation and program policy.
- Must be nutritionally equivalent to cow's milk.
- Served to children or adults with medical or special dietary needs.
- Require a medical statement for non-dairy beverages to assure that the substitute is meeting the nutritional needs of children and adults.
- Consistent with the National School Lunch Program.

Food Preparation

Deep-fat frying (cooking by submerging in hot oil or other fat) is no longer an allowable means of preparing food. Institutions do have flexibility in how they choose to prepare meals such as sautéing, pan-frying, and stir-frying foods.

Additional Provisions

The final rule also maintains or has slightly modified additional requirements as follows:

- The new meal patterns prohibit the use of food and beverage as a reward or punishment.
- Water must be available to all children throughout the day.
- To allow parents/guardians, an adult participant, or a person on behalf of the adult participant to provide one meal component for children or adults with a non-disability medical or special dietary need. The meal can be claimed for reimbursement.
- Family Style Meal Service is now rule.

- The new meal patterns extend offer versus serve to at-risk afterschool programs.
- The final rule impacts other child nutrition programs such as:
 - The revision of the NSLP, SBP meal patterns for children 0 through 4 years old to reflect the CACFP meal patterns.
 - Removes offer versus serve for meals served to children 0 through 4 years old in the NSLP and SBP.
 - Revises the SMP milk requirements to match CACFP's milk requirements.

These changes were made to increase consistency among child nutrition programs and ensure that all preschool age children are receiving the same nutritious meals.

Best Practices to the New CACFP Meal Pattern

The final rules preamble speaks of best practices which are optional. These practices are vital tools to encourage institutions to further strengthen the nutritional quality of the meals they serve. Best practices serve as a guide by highlighting areas where institutions can, if they choose, take additional steps. These practices reflect recommendations from the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), the Dietary Guidelines, and public comment. They were not included as requirements due to cost or complexity.

Because best practices are optional, they will not appear in regulatory text. Best practices will be issued in policy guidance provided to the State agency and then to the institutions.



Child care providers have the unique ability to influence positive development early in a child's life, making it particularly important for providers to adopt the best practices and share strategies for successful implementation.

Infants

Institutions should support mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants by encouraging mothers to supply breastmilk for their infants while in care and offer a quiet, private area that is comfortable and sanitary for mothers who come to the institution to breastfeed.

Vegetable and Fruit

Institutions are encouraged to make at least one of the two required components of snack a vegetable or a fruit.

Serve a variety of fruits, choosing whole fruits whether it be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried. This is a recommendation by the Dietary Guidelines.

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. The addition of other vegetable subgroups is now included – including starchy vegetables.

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. These are recommendations by the Dietary Guidelines.

Milk

Serve only unflavored milk to all participants.

Serve water as a beverage when serving yogurt in place of milk for adult

Additional Best Practices

Incorporate seasonal and locally produced foods into meals. This helps children learn where food comes from and helps improve the quality of the meal.

Be mindful about limiting the serving of non-creditable foods that are sources of added sugars, such as sweet toppings (e.g., honey, jam, syrup), mix-in ingredients sold with yogurt (e.g., honey, candy, or cookie pieces), and sugar sweetened beverages (e.g., fruit drinks or sodas).

Adult day care centers should offer and make water available to adults upon their request. Water must be available to children in childcare all throughout the day.

Getting from Here to There

With the implementation date of October 1, 2017, child care institutions have about a year to comply with the new meal pattern requirements.

FNS has put together an implementation plan to make sure that we all get from here to there. Along with training that will be provided to State agencies to help with implementation, other resources to view for history and additional guidance are the new [CACFP webpage](#), policy guidance, and team nutrition resources.

On the CACFP webpage, you will notice a *Guidance and Technical Assistance* section at the bottom of the page. This section provides the State agency along with child care institutions resources in regards to the implementation of the new meal pattern. More resources will be added to this section as they are developed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the new meal pattern requirements are cost-neutral, achievable, and make significant improvements to the nutritional quality of meals served in the CACFP.

These new meal patterns lay the foundation for a healthy eating pattern, provide best practices to up the standards, and future references and trainings will provide the tools needed so that together, we can, and will, successfully implement the new meal pattern as of October 1, 2017!

Activity One

List 3 actions you will take or activities you do in your CACFP Program to comply with the new CACFP Meal Pattern by October 1, 2017.

Quiz One

1. Compliance with the new CACFP Meal Patterns is required by...
 - a. October 1, 2016
 - b. January 1, 2017
 - c. October 1, 2017
 - d. January 1, 2018

2. Finish the sentence, "In the new CACFP meal pattern, the food groups..."
 - a. are the same as before, there is no change."
 - b. for fruits and vegetables are separated."
 - c. for breads and grains are separated."
 - d. for meat/meat alternates and fluid milk are combined."

3. The new Infant Meal Pattern provides...
 - a. one age category: 0 to one year.
 - b. two age categories: 0 to 5 months and 6 to 11 months.
 - c. three age categories: 0-3 months, 4-7 months and 8-11 months.
 - d. no age categories. Age categories were not specified.

4. In the new Infant Meal Pattern, infant meals breastfed by their mother at the child care facility...
 - a. are reimbursable.
 - b. are reimbursable but only for infants 0-5 months of age.
 - c. are reimbursable but only for infants of mothers employed at the facility.
 - d. are reimbursable all at the 'free' rate of reimbursement (the highest rate available).

5. The new Child Meal Pattern...
 - a. Requires a fruit to be served at every meal.
 - b. Requires a vegetable to be served at every meal.
 - c. Requires a protein food to be served at every meal.
 - d. Allows a protein food to be served at breakfast instead of a grain, up to 3 times per week.

6. The new Child Meal Pattern...
 - a. Limits juice.
 - b. Limits the amount of sugar contained in ready-to-eat cereals.
 - c. Limits kinds of milk served.
 - d. All the above.

7. The new Child Meal Pattern...
 - a. Allows yogurt as a substitute for milk.
 - b. Allows water to be substituted for milk.
 - c. Allows any milk substitutes for milk for any reason.
 - d. None of the above are allowed.

8. Best practices for the new CACFP Meal Pattern...
 - a. Are required.
 - b. Are recommended and encouraged.
 - c. Are not important.
 - d. Are not affordable.

9. Directors of child care centers _____ about the new CACFP Meal Pattern.
 - a. are required to train their staff
 - b. are required to hire a trainer to train their staff
 - c. are required to test and prove their staff knowledge
 - d. are not required to train their staff.

10. The new CACFP Meal Pattern is...
 - a. Based on the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
 - b. Based on the Institute of Medicine's recommendations.
 - c. Based on considerations of the real costs of food, food service equipment and food service personnel in the CACFP Program.
 - d. All the above.