

Healthy Meals and Nutrition Environment

At-Risk Afterschool centers provide a much needed service to their communities. They give children a safe place to go after school and nutritious food that gives them the energy they need to concentrate on homework and join their friends in physical, educational, and social activities. At-Risk Afterschool centers and Outside School Hours Care Centers (OSHCC) serve an important role in helping young children develop good eating and physical activity habits.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern requires At-Risk Afterschool centers to serve meals that meet the nutritional needs of children and are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs), and are appetizing. Meal pattern requirements assist the menu planner in providing well-balanced meals and snacks that provide the appropriate amount of energy and nutrients a child needs during critical stages of growth. The At-Risk Afterschool meal pattern lists the requirements for children 6 to 12 years old. Children 13 to 18 must be served the minimum or larger than those portions specified for ages 6 to 12.

The DGAs are jointly issued and updated every five years by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services. They are designed for policymakers and nutrition and health professionals. The aim of the DGAs is to promote health and prevent disease. The DGAs provide four overarching guidelines that encourage healthy eating patterns at each stage of life and recognize that individuals will need to make shifts in their food and beverage choices to achieve a healthy pattern.

The DGAs Key Recommendations call for Americans to 1) follow a healthy eating pattern at every stage of life; 2) customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations; 3) focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages, and stay within calorie limits; and 4) limit food and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* is available at: <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>.

The recommendations in the DGAs are transitioned into consumer messages through MyPlate. MyPlate serves as a template for balance, variety, and moderation. MyPlate is not a special diet for individuals with specific health conditions. Individuals with a chronic health condition should consult with a health care provider to determine what dietary pattern is appropriate for them. MyPlate resources and tools are available at: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.

Water Availability

Drinking water must be made available to children throughout the day, including at meal times. While water must be made available to children during meals, it is not part of the reimbursable meals and cannot be served in lieu of milk. Water can be made available to children in a variety of ways, including simply providing water to a child when it is requested. Contact the CACFP for questions pertaining to this requirement. (CACFP 20-2011 Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010: Water Availability in the CACFP, May 11, 2011)