

# Menu Planning Guidelines

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Pattern Requirements, the Crediting Handbook for the CACFP, and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Buying Guide (FBG) for Child Nutrition Program assure that children participating in the CACFP are served foods that supply the nutrients they need. Afterschool center menus have a major influence in the development of children's eating habits. It is important that menus help establish patterns for healthy eating.

## These guidelines may help children to develop healthy eating habits:

- Select a form for documenting your daily menus. The At-Risk Snack & Supper Menu Template is recommended; this form lists the food components required for each meal and snack. A five and seven day version is available at: <http://health.mo.gov/cacfp - Forms>.
- Choose the type of menu format you will use; two to three week cycle menu format is recommended. A cycle menu is a set of menus that are repeated in the same order for a period of time, typically two, three, or four weeks. Cycle menus provide variety by offering different foods and/or different food combinations each day during the cycle.
- When there are substitutions from the planned menu, mark through the original menu item and enter the substitution. The original daily dated menu that notes substitutions must be kept with the monthly records and retained for three years plus current year.
- Know the cooking abilities of the person(s) preparing the meals. Review the menu and recipes with the cook and provide training as necessary. Select or develop standardized recipes for menu items.
- Plan menu items based on the equipment available in the center's kitchen.
- Include all food components in at least the minimum portions sizes required for reimbursement. It is usually easiest to start by planning the main dish or entrée.
- Plan menus that keep the nutritional needs of children in focus. Be sure to include a good source of iron and Vitamins A and C.
  - Iron sources include: asparagus, lima beans, sweet potatoes, squash, vegetable juice, turkey, tuna, apricots, cherries, dried fruit, dried peas, eggs, meat, and green beans.
  - Vitamin A sources include: apricots, cantaloupe, cherries, plums, egg yolk, asparagus, broccoli, carrots, kale, peas, and sweet potatoes.
  - Vitamin C sources include: citrus fruit and juice, broccoli, asparagus, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, snow pears, peppers (green and red), cantaloupe, honeydew melon, mango, papaya, kiwi, and strawberries.
- Limit high fat and sodium meats to no more than one time per week. This includes but not limited to: hot dogs, sausage, lunchmeat, and processed meats.
- Grain-based desserts do not count toward the grain requirement with the exception of sweet crackers, which includes graham crackers of all shapes and animal crackers.
- Specify the type of fruit, juice, or vegetables on your menus to assure a variety of food is served and to document the nutritional value of the meal.
- Specify the type of cereal and yogurt to ensure sugar requirements are met. Maintain documentation with the CACFP records.
- Make sure the meals look and taste good. Introduce new foods along with familiar foods that children already like.
- Include foods that are different shapes: round, square, rectangular; and different colors: yellow, orange, red, and green.

- Combine foods that have different textures: soft, crunchy, crisp, creamy, and smooth; and different taste: sweet, sour, tart, salty, spicy, and mild.
- Consider the different ethnic and cultural food habits and preferences of children.
- Fat-free or low-fat milk is required at each meal for participants two years of age and older. Milk served to one year olds must be unflavored whole milk. Serve breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula to infants through 11 months of age. Flavored fat-free milk may be served to participants six years old or older. Document the type of milk served on the menu. This includes listing the fat content (whole, low-fat, 1%, fat-free, or skim) and if the milk is flavored.
- Use fats and oils sparingly in food preparation and limit the use of salt and high sodium foods.

**Standardized Recipes:** A standardized recipe is one that has been tried several times using the same method and equipment. A standardized recipe produces consistency in product quality and yield the same number of servings every time it is used as long as the same procedures, equipment, and ingredients are used. Because standardized recipes specify exact amounts of ingredients, it is easier to manage the cost and storage of foods. A link to the USDA Standardized Recipes is available on the CACFP website at: <http://health.mo.gov/cacfp>.

**The USDA FBG for Child Nutrition Programs is available as an interactive web-based tool, as a mobile app, and as a downloadable PDF.** USDA resources help you determine the right amount of food and appropriate type of food to purchase for your program. These resources aid in determining the specific meal contribution each food makes towards the meal pattern requirements, as well as providing information on recipe analysis. **The FBG, Web-based Interactive FBG, The FBG Mobile App, and The FBG Calculator** are available online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>.

