Five Meal Components for Child Care Centers

Milk

Unflavored whole milk must be served to 1-year-old children; unflavored whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, or fat-free milk must be served to children 2 through 5 years of age; unflavored or flavored whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, or fat-free milk can be served to children 6 years and older, including adults.

Specifics:

- Must be pasteurized fluid milk. Cultured buttermilk may be served if it meets the required fat standards.
- Required component at breakfast, lunch, and supper.
- Milk may be served as a beverage, on cereal, or used for both at breakfast and snack. Lunch and supper require milk to be served as a beverage.
- Milk used in cooking is not creditable.
- Infants ages birth through 11 months must be provided breastmilk (including breastfed on site) or iron-fortified infant formula.
- Milk may not be served for snacks when juice is served as the second component.

Meat/Meat Alternate (m/ma)

Includes lean meat, poultry, fish, cheese, egg, cooked dry beans, peas and lentils, nuts and seeds, and their butters, tofu, alternate protein products, and yogurt - creditable at lunch, supper, and snack. An m/ma may replace the grain component at breakfast a maximum of 3 times per week.

Specifics:

- Cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils may credit as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate, but not as both in the same meal. Immature beans and peas, such as green peas, green beans and wax beans, cannot credit as a meat alternate, only as a vegetable.
- Required at lunch and supper – must be served as the main dish or in a main dish and one other menu item.
- Nuts, seeds, and their butters may be used to meet full m/ma requirements at all meals and snacks.
- Tofu, yogurt, and soy yogurt (yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams (g) of added sugars per 6 oz., maintain documentation on file) may be used to meet the m/ma alternate component.
- Yogurt credits as 4 oz. = 1 ounce equivalent m/ma.
- For a food to contribute to the M/MA component, it must contain a minimum of 0.25 oz. eq. of a M/MA.
- A combination of food served as a main dish may be credited as the m/ma plus up to 2 other meal components (3 total), provided each component meets the minimum meal pattern requirement.
- Limiting serving processed meats (lunch meat, cold cuts, hot dogs, and sausage products) to no more than one serving per week is recommended.
- Commercially processed food must have processed food documentation (CN label, product formulation statement) to be creditable.
- May be served in place of the entire grain component at breakfast, a maximum of 3 times per week. One ounce equivalent of m/ma can be substituted for 1 ounce equivalent of grain (*see above regarding yogurt serving size to credit as 1 oz. of m/ma).

Vegetable
Includes fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and full-strength vegetable juice.

Specifics:
- One cup of raw leafy greens counts as ½ cup of vegetables.
- One serving of either a fruit OR a vegetable or both is required at breakfast.
- A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch/supper.
- When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.
- Pasteurized full-strength 100% juice may only be used to meet the vegetable requirement at one meal, including snack, per day.
- The minimum creditable serving size for vegetables is ⅛ cup.

Fruit
Includes fresh, frozen, dried, or canned fruit and full-strength fruit juice.

Specifics:
- Fruits may be served fresh, frozen, canned, dried or as 100% pasteurized fruit juice.
- One serving of either a fruit OR a vegetable or both is required at breakfast.
- ¼ cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit.
- Pasteurized full-strength 100% juice may only be used to meet the fruit requirement at one meal, including snacks, per day.
- Juice may not be served at snack when milk is served as a component.
- Combinations such as fruit cocktail may be credited to meet one of the two required components at lunch or supper.
- One serving of fruit can be replaced with a vegetable at lunch/supper.
- The minimum creditable serving size for fruits is ⅛ cup.

Grains
Includes whole grain-rich or enriched bread, bread products, or whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cereal grain, cooked pasta or noodle products, or breakfast cereal; or any combination of these foods.

Specifics:
- Required at breakfast, lunch, and supper.
- At least 1 grain per day must be whole grain (WG) rich (documentation must be maintained in file). (Whole grain-rich foods are those in which the grain content is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain, with any remaining grains being enriched or are 100% whole grain.")
- Breakfast cereals are traditionally served as breakfast menu items, so it is best practice to avoid serving them at lunch or supper. Cereal must contain no more than 6 grams (g) of added sugars per dry ounce (maintain documentation on file).
- Grain-based desserts do not count toward the grain requirement, except for sweet crackers, which include graham crackers of all shapes and animal crackers.
- An m/ma may be used to meet the entire grain component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week.