

Offer versus Serve in Adult Day Care Centers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This guidance applies to adult day care centers that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#).

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OVS in Adult Day Care Centers in the CACFP

Overview of OVS Requirements

OVS is an optional approach to menu planning and meal service in the CACFP. OVS allows enrolled adults (participants) in CACFP adult day care centers to decline some of the foods offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper. OVS is not allowed at snack.

OVS at breakfast

For a reimbursable breakfast with OVS, the adult day care center must offer the full serving of at least four food items from the three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains) required by the [CACFP adult breakfast meal pattern](#). Participants must select the full serving of at least three food items.

OVS at lunch and supper

For a reimbursable lunch with OVS, the adult day care center must offer the full serving of the five meal components (milk, vegetables, fruits, grains, and meats/meat alternates [MMA]) required by the [CACFP adult lunch/supper meal pattern](#). Participants must select the full serving of at least three components.

Milk is optional at supper. For a reimbursable supper with OVS, the adult day care center must offer the full serving of the five meal components (milk, vegetables, fruits, grains, and MMA) or the full serving of four meal components (vegetables, fruits, grains, and MMA). Regardless of whether milk is offered, participants must always select the full serving of at least three components at lunch and supper. If the menu offers five meal components, participants may decline any two meal components, including milk. If the menu offers four meal components (no milk), participants may decline any one meal component.

Required CSDE approval

CACFP adult day care centers that choose to implement OVS must notify the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [CACFP staff](#) and receive approval prior to beginning implementation. CACFP menus and meal service must follow all OVS requirements.



Meal Components and Food Items

The determination of reimbursable meals under OVS is based on the participant's selection of the full serving of a minimum number of meal components (lunch and supper) or food items (breakfast).

- A **meal component** is one of the food groups that comprise a reimbursable meal. The breakfast meal pattern requires three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains). The lunch meal pattern requires five meal components (milk, MMA, vegetables, fruits, and grains). The supper meal pattern is the same as lunch, except milk is optional.
 - Milk must be low-fat (1%) or fat-free, either unflavored or flavored. The USDA's [CACFP best practices](#) recommend only unflavored milk.
 - Grains must be whole grain rich (WGR) or enriched. At least one serving per day must be WGR (refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)). Grain menu items must meet the required weights (groups A-E) or volumes (groups H-I) in the CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) or provide the minimum creditable grains per serving (refer to the CSDE's resource, [Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)).
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five meal components. For example, a hamburger on a whole-grain bun is one food item that contains two meal components (grains and MMA). A ½-cup serving of applesauce and a ½-cup serving of blueberries are two food items from the fruits component. A 1-cup serving of brown rice and a 2-ounce whole-grain bagel are two food items from the grains component.
- The **full serving** is the minimum amount required by the CACFP adult meal patterns.

CACFP menus may provide the required meal components as single food items (such as chicken, pasta, fruit, and vegetables) or combination foods. Combination foods contain more than one meal component, such as sandwiches, pizza, and smoothies made with yogurt and pureed fruit. For example, macaroni and cheese contains pasta (grains component) and cheese (MMA component). Combination foods generally cannot be separated (such as burritos and pizza) or are not intended to be separated (such as a hamburger on a bun or a turkey sandwich).

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Signage

If the CACFP menu offers combination foods, or two or more food items from one meal component (such as bread and rice), the adult day care center must provide instructions or signage about the OVS requirements. This signage must indicate what choices make up a reimbursable meal and let participants know that they cannot select two of the same food items (breakfast) or meal components (lunch and supper). The examples below illustrate this requirement.

- A participant cannot select milk and two pieces of toast for a reimbursable breakfast because this choice provides only two food items (milk and grains). A reimbursable breakfast must always contain at least three food items.
- A participant cannot select two servings of chicken and one serving of rice for a reimbursable lunch because this choice provides only two meal components (MMA component and grains component). A reimbursable lunch or supper must always contain at least three meal components.



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OVS at Breakfast

The adult day care center must offer the full serving of at least four food different items from the three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains). The four food items cannot include two servings of milk.

Breakfast menus cannot include two servings of the same food item. For example, a breakfast menu that offers a serving of milk, a serving of banana, and two servings of toast (such as one slice of enriched cinnamon-raisin bread and one slice of whole-wheat bread) is not reimbursable because the two servings of toast are the same food item (grains component).

Participants must select the full serving of at least three food items for a reimbursable meal. Participants can decline any one food item. Table 1 summarizes the requirements for OVS at breakfast.

Table 1. OVS breakfast requirements for CACFP adult day care centers

Center must offer at least four food items	Participant must select
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Milk, 1 cup2. Vegetables/fruits, ½ cup3. Grains, 2 ounce equivalents (oz eq)4. MMA (1 oz eq) or additional serving of vegetables/fruits (½ cup) or additional serving of grains (1 oz eq)	At least three different food items (participants may decline any one food item)

Menu planning guidance for breakfast

Breakfasts in adult day care centers must meet the criteria below to be reimbursable under OVS.

- Larger servings of the same component count as only one food item for OVS. For example, 1 cup of strawberries counts as one food item (vegetables/fruits component). A 3-ounce whole-wheat bagel or two servings of whole-grain toast each count as one food item (grains component).

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- If the breakfast menu offers the full serving of a meal component as two separate food items, participants must take both food items to count as one food item for OVS. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - The CACFP breakfast meal pattern requires $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables/fruits component. If the breakfast menu offers $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sliced peaches and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of pineapple tidbits, participants must select both food items to count as one food item (vegetables/fruits component) for OVS.
 - The CACFP breakfast meal pattern requires 2 oz eq of the grains component. If the breakfast menu offers 1 oz eq of whole-grain cereal and 1 oz eq of a whole-grain muffin, participants must select both food items to count as one food item (grains component) for OVS.
- Amounts less than a full serving do not count as a food item for OVS. For example, a participant's selection of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of cantaloupe does not count as a food item because the required breakfast meal pattern serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.
- Participants may decline any one of the four food items, including milk.
- If the breakfast menu includes four food items, two of which are in a combination food, participants cannot decline the combination food. For example, a breakfast menu includes a whole-grain muffin, milk, and a yogurt-fruit smoothie (combination food that contains the MMA component and vegetables/fruits component). Participants must select the smoothie (two food items) and one other food item for a reimbursable breakfast.



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Examples of OVS at Breakfast

The examples below show how to implement OVS at breakfast. The adult day care center must offer the full serving of at least four food items. For a reimbursable breakfast, participants must select the full serving of at least three different food items.

Example 1: Breakfast menu with four food items

Breakfast meal pattern for OVS	Planned menu	Food items
Grains (G), 2 oz eq	Whole-grain bagel, 2 ounces	1 G ¹
Vegetables and Fruits (VF), ½ cup	Strawberries, ½ cup	1 VF
Milk (M), 1 cup	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 M
MMA (1 oz eq) or additional VF (½ cup) or G (1 oz eq)	Orange slices, ½ cup	1 VF

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one food item for OVS.

Participant selects	Full food items	Reimbursable meal?
Strawberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 VF and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Strawberries (1 VF)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 VF).
Bagel (1 G) Milk (1 M)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 M).
Strawberries (1 VF) Orange slices (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 VF and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Orange slices (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Strawberries (1 VF) Orange slices (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 VF and 1 G).

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Example 2: Breakfast menu with five food items

Breakfast meal pattern for OVS	Planned menu	Food items
G, 2 oz eq	Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice Whole-grain cereal, 1 oz eq	2 G
VF, ½ cup	Blueberries, ½ cup	1 VF
M, 1 cup	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 M
MMA (1 oz eq) or additional VF (½ cup) or G (1 oz eq)	Peanut butter, 2 tablespoons	1 MMA
G, 2 oz eq	Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice Whole-grain cereal, 1 oz eq	2 G

Participant selects	Full food items	Reimbursable meal?
Toast (1 G) Cereal (1 G) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 G and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Peanut butter (1 MMA) Blueberries (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 MMA, and 1 VF).
Toast (1 G) Cereal (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 G and 1 VF).
Toast (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Peanut butter (1 MMA) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 MMA, and 1 M).
Peanut butter (1 MMA) Blueberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 MMA, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Toast, 2 slices (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 VF). Two servings of the same food count as only one food item.

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OVS at Lunch and Supper

The adult day care center must offer the full serving (minimum required amount) of the five meal components (milk, MMA, vegetables, fruits, and grains). The supper meal pattern requirements are the same as lunch except milk is optional. Each supper must include the full serving of the four meal components (MMA, vegetables, fruits, and grains) or the five meal components, if milk is served. Participants must select the full serving of at least three meal components for a reimbursable meal.

- **Lunch:** The adult day care center must offer all five meal components. Participants may decline any two meal components at lunch, including milk.
- **Supper:** The adult day care center must offer all meal components. Milk is optional at supper. If the supper menu does not include milk, participants may decline any one meal component. If the supper menu includes milk, participants may decline any two meal components at lunch, including milk.

For a reimbursable lunch or supper, participants must always select the full serving of at least three meal components.

Table 2 summarizes the OVS requirements for lunch and supper.

Table 2. OVS lunch and supper requirements

Center must offer all five components at lunch and all four components at supper	Participant must select
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Milk, 1 cup ¹2. Fruits, ½ cup3. Vegetables, ½ cup4. Grains, 2 oz eq5. MMA, 2 oz eq	At least three meal components (participants may decline any two meal components for lunch and any one meal component for supper)

¹ Milk is optional in the CACFP adult supper meal pattern. If milk is not offered, participants must still select the full serving of at least three meal components.

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Menu planning guidance for lunch and supper

Lunches and suppers in adult day care centers must meet the criteria below to be reimbursable under OVS.

- Larger servings of the same food count as only one meal component. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - A 1-cup serving of broccoli counts as only one meal component (vegetables component).
 - Two 1-ounce slices of whole-grain bread (2 oz eq) count as only one meal component (grains component).
- If the menu offers the full serving of a meal component as two separate foods, participants must take both foods to count as one meal component for OVS. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - The lunch/supper meal pattern requires $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables component. If the lunch menu offers $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of broccoli and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of corn, participants must select both foods to count as the full vegetables component.
 - The lunch/supper meal pattern requires 2 oz eq of the grains component. If the lunch menu offers 1 oz eq of brown rice and 1 oz eq of whole-wheat roll, participants must select both foods to count as the full grains component.
- Amounts less than the full serving do not count as a meal component for OVS. For example, a selection of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of broccoli does not count as the vegetables component because the required lunch and supper meal pattern serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.
- If a combination food contains three or more meal components, a participant cannot decline the combination food. For example, a lunch menu offers spinach lasagna made with cheese (MMA component), lasagna noodles (grains component), and spinach and tomato sauce (vegetables component) served with apple slices (fruits component) and milk. Participants must select at least the lasagna (three meal components) for a reimbursable meal.

Examples of OVS at Lunch at Supper

The examples below show how to implement OVS at lunch and supper. The adult day care center must offer the full serving of all meal components. For a reimbursable lunch or supper, participants must select the full serving of at least three meal components.

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Lunch/supper menu example 1

Lunch/supper meal pattern	Planned menu	Meal pattern contribution
MMA, 2 oz eq	Turkey, 2 ounces	2 oz eq MMA
G, 2 oz eq	Whole-wheat bread, two 1-ounce slices	2 oz eq G
V, ½ cup	Broccoli florets, ¾ cup	¾ cup V ¹
F, ½ cup	Cantaloupe slices, ½ cup	½ cup F
M, 1 cup (optional at supper)	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 cup M

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one meal component for OVS.

Participant selects	Menu items	Full meal components	Reimbursable meal?
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G)	1	2	No. The selected meal contains only two components (MMA and G).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe slices (F)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and F).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli florets (V)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and V).
Broccoli florets (V) Cantaloupe slices (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (V, F, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli florets (V) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes. The selected meal contains four components (MMA, G, V, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe slices (F) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes. The selected meal contains four components (MMA, G, F, and M).

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Lunch/supper menu example 2

Lunch/supper meal pattern	Planned menu	Meal pattern contribution
MMA, 2 oz eq	Meat sauce, 2 ounces of cooked hamburger	2 ounces MMA
G, 2 oz eq	Spaghetti, 1 cup ¹	2 oz eq G
V, ½ cup	Tossed garden salad, 1 cup	½ cup V ²
F, ½ cup	Fruit salad, ½ cup	½ cup F
M, 1 cup (optional at supper)	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 cup M

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one meal component for OVS.

Participant selects	Menu items	Full meal components	Reimbursable meal?
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA)	2	2	No. The selected meal contains only two components (G and MMA).
Spaghetti (G) Fruit salad (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (G, F, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Tossed salad (V) Milk (M)	4	4	Yes. The selected meal contains four components (G, MMA, V, and M).
Salad (V) Fruit salad (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains two components (V, F, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (G, MMA, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Fruit salad (F)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains two components (G, MMA, and F).

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Resources

Adult Day Care: A Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/adult-day-care-child-and-adult-care-food-program-handbook>

CACFP Adult Day Care Centers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-adult-day-care-centers>

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs>

Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-cacfp-adult-day-care-centers>

Crediting Summary Charts for the CACFP Adult Meal Patterns (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_cacfp_adults.pdf

Guide to Meeting the CACFP Adult Meal Patterns and Crediting Requirements (CSDE guide):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/guide_cacfp_meal_patterns_adults.pdf

Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/guide_wgr_requirement_cacfp.pdf

Meal Patterns for CACFP Adult Day Care Centers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-cacfp-adult-centers>

Offer Versus Serve in the CACFP (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-versus-serve-cacfp>

USDA Memo CACFP 02-2025: Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cacfp/offer-versus-serve-family-style-meals>

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp>

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For more information on the CACFP adult meal patterns, visit the [Meal Patterns for CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpage or contact the [CACFP staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/ovs_adult_cacfp.pdf.

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2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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