Sample Hot Lunch and Supper Menus for Centers and Family Day Care Homes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Program Year 2025-26 (October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2026)

This document provides guidance and sample cold lunch and supper menus for ages 3-5 in child care centers, emergency shelters, at-risk afterschool care centers, and family day care homes that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). These sample menus are based on the CACFP meal patterns for children, including the updates required by the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

For information on the CACFP meal patterns for children, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Contents

Overview of Lunch and Supper Meal Pattern Requirements 2
- Meats/meat alternates (MMA) component 2
- Fruits component and vegetables component 3
- Grains component 3
- Milk component 4
- Noncreditable foods 5

Required Crediting Documentation 5

Sample Lunch and Supper Menus 6
- Week 1 7
- Week 2 8
- Week 3 9
- Week 4 10
- Week 5 11
- Week 6 12

Resources 13

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Overview of Lunch and Supper Meal Pattern Requirements

The CACFP lunch and supper meal pattern for ages 3-5 requires minimum servings of five meal components, including ¾ cup of unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, 1½ ounce equivalents (oz eq) of meats/meat alternates, ¼ cup of vegetables, ¼ cup of fruits, and ½ oz eq of grains. Vegetables may substitute for the entire fruits component at any lunch or supper.

Each meal component must provide at least the minimum meal pattern serving. CACFP menus may include additional foods or larger servings beyond the minimum requirements. Serve nutrient-dense foods that are appropriate to children's nutrition needs.

Menu planners should consider the meal pattern requirements and recommendations below when planning CACFP menus. For guidance on crediting foods, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Summary Charts for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Meats/meat alternates (MMA) component

- The MMA must be served in a main dish or a main dish and one other food item.
- The serving size of MMA refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, fillers, or other ingredients. Commercial processed products (such as combination entrees, deli meats, hot dogs, and sausages) require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and *Crediting Deli Meats in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.
- Nut and seed butters credit by volume (tablespoons) not weight. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.
- Yogurt and soy yogurt cannot exceed 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (no more than 2 grams of added sugars per ounce). For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Yogurt in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.
- The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend serving only lean meats, nuts, and beans, peas, and lentils; limiting processed meats to one serving per week; and serving only low-fat or reduced-fat natural cheese.

For more information, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Fruits component and vegetables component

- Vegetables may substitute for the entire fruits component at any lunch or supper. The two vegetable servings must be different kinds.
- Dried fruits credit as twice the volume served. For example, ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component.
- Raw leafy greens such as lettuce or spinach credit as half the volume served. For example, ½ cup of raw leafy greens credits as ¼ cup of the vegetables component.
- Pasteurized full-strength juice credits as either the vegetables component or fruits component at only one meal or snack per day. The juice limit includes fruit and vegetable juice, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies. Before planning juice at lunch or supper, make sure that the other daily meals and snacks do not contain juice. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Juices in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and *Crediting Smoothies in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.*
- The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice.

For more information, visit the "Fruits" section and the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Grains component

- At least one serving of grains per day must be whole grain-rich (WGR). The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend at least two servings of WGR grains per day. To meet the CACFP WGR criteria, foods must contain at least 50 percent whole grains and the remaining grain ingredients must be enriched, bran, or germ. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit "Whole Grain-rich Requirement" in the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.
- To credit as the required oz eq, the serving of grain products and recipes must provide either: 1) the required serving weight (groups A-E) or volume (groups H-I) in the USDA's Exhibit A chart (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and *How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*); or 2) the minimum creditable grains per serving (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Calculation Methods for Grains Ounce Equivalents for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and *When Commercial Grain*

Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the Child and Adult Care Food Program). For more information, visit "Serving Requirements" in the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

- Grain-based desserts do not credit. Examples include cookies, piecrusts in sweet pies, doughnuts, cereal bars, granola bars, sweet rolls, pastries, toaster pastries, cake, and brownies. Sweet crackers (such as graham crackers and animal crackers) are allowed but the CSDE recommends limiting them to no more than twice per week between all meals and snacks. For more information, visit the USDA's Grain-based Desserts in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage

- Breakfast cereals must be WGR, enriched, or fortified and cannot exceed 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

For more information, visit the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Milk component

- The CACFP meal patterns for ages 3-5 require unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk.

For more information, visit the "Milk" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Noncreditable foods

Noncreditable foods cannot be served in place of the required meal components. Examples of noncreditable foods include potato chips, pudding, ice cream, gelatin, cream cheese, bacon, condiments (e.g., syrup, jam, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and butter), and water. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Noncreditable Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Required Crediting Documentation

CACFP facilities must be able to document that CACFP menus provide the minimum portion of each required meal component. Menu planners must use the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) to determine how foods credit and the amount that provides the required meal pattern serving.

Commercial processed foods not listed in the FBG require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. The USDA requires that CACFP facilities must verify PFS forms for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the product in reimbursable meals and snacks. For information on crediting documentation for processed foods, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Using Product Formulation Statements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program,* and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Foods made from scratch must have a standardized recipe that documents the crediting information per serving. For information on standardized recipes, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition's *Recipe Standardization Guide for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the "Standardized Recipes" section of the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Additional guidance is available on the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage. Training on the requirements for CN labels and PFS forms is available in Module 8: Meal Pattern Documentation for Crediting Commercial Processed Products, of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.

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Sample Lunch and Supper Menus

This document contains six sample hot lunch and supper menus. The servings in each menu provide at least the minimum requirements of the CACFP meal patterns for children and are indicated in parentheses after each menu item. Servings may be adjusted as appropriate or other ages.

The CSDE's sample menus are intended for informational purposes and do not guarantee compliance with the CACFP meal patterns for children. Crediting information for local child care menus will vary depending on the types of foods purchased by the CACFP facility, and the recipes and preparation techniques used by CACFP staff. CACFP facilities are responsible for ensuring that their menus meet the CACFP meal patterns for children and maintaining appropriate crediting documentation on file (refer to "Required Crediting Documentation" in this document).

Sample Hot Lunch and Supper for Menus for Centers and Family Day Care Homes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Week 1

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Macaroni and cheese: Cheddar cheese (1½ ounces)	Tossed salad: Lettuce (½ cup) with tomatoes and carrots (⅛ cup)	Orange slices (¼ cup)	Enriched macaroni (¼ cup)	Low-fat Italian dressing (2 teaspoons)
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Baked ham (1½ ounces)	Mashed sweet potato (¼ cup)	Steamed broccoli (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Whole-wheat roll (½ ounce) **WGR**	Mustard (2 teaspoons)
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Herbed chicken (1½ ounces cooked chicken)	Green beans (⅛ cup) Roasted red potatoes (⅛ cup)	Mixed berries (¼ cup)	Brown rice (¼ cup) **WGR**	
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Black bean soup: Beans (⅜ cup)	Spinach salad (½ cup) with oranges	Mandarin oranges (⅛ cup) Mango slices (⅛ cup)	Whole-grain crackers (½ ounce) **WGR**	Low-fat salad dressing (2 teaspoons)
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Hamburger (1½ ounces cooked)	Mixed vegetables (¼ cup)	Sliced cantaloupe (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat bun (½ ounce) **WGR**	Ketchup or mustard (2 teaspoons)

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Week 2

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Taco salad: Seasoned ground beef (1½ ounces cooked) and shredded cheese (¼ ounce)	Shredded lettuce (⅛ cup), diced tomato (⅛ cup), mild veggie salsa (⅛ cup) Corn niblets (⅛ cup)	Pineapple chunks (¼ cup)	Whole-corn tortilla (½ ounce) **WGR**	
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Toasted cheese sandwich: Ham (1 ounce) and American cheese (½ ounce)	Vegetable soup (⅛ c vegetables) Roasted kale (⅛ cup)	Sliced kiwi (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat bread (½ ounce) **WGR**	
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Mild vegetable chili: Black beans and kidney beans (⅜ cup)	Tomato sauce in chili (⅛ cup) Baked sweet potato wedges (¼ cup)	Watermelon chunks (¼ cup)	Enriched cornbread (1 ounce)	
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Baked chicken (1½ ounces cooked chicken)	Mashed butternut squash (¼ cup)	Snap peas (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Herbed quinoa (¼ cup) **WGR**	Low-fat salad dressing (2 teaspoons)
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Crunchy coated baked fish (1½ ounces cooked fish)	Peas and carrots (⅛ cup) Roasted red potatoes (⅛ cup)	Steamed broccoli florets (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Enriched couscous (¼ cup)	

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Week 3

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Cheese quesadilla triangles: Reduced-fat cheese (1½ ounces)	Garden salad (½ cup) Mild veggie salsa (⅛ cup)	Mandarin oranges (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat tortilla (½ ounce) **WGR**	Low-fat salad dressing (2 teaspoons)
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Roast beef (1½ ounces cooked)	Mashed potatoes (¼ cup)	Steamed carrots (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Enriched golden cornbread (1 ounce)	Gravy (1 tablespoon)
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Lentil soup (⅜ cup lentils)	Red and green pepper strips (¼ cup)	Diced nectarines (¼ cup)	Whole-grain crackers (½ ounce) **WGR**	
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Chicken veggie stir-fry: Chicken (1½ ounces cooked)	Stir-fry vegetables: Carrots, celery, peppers, broccoli (¼ cup)	Pineapple tidbits (¼ cup)	Brown rice (¼ cup) **WGR**	
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Spaghetti with meat sauce (1½ ounces cooked ground beef)	Cucumber-tomato salad (¼ cup)	Sliced fresh pears (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat spaghetti (¼ cup) **WGR**	Grated parmesan cheese (2 teaspoons)

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Week 4

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Toasted ham (1 ounce) and cheese (½ ounce) sandwich	Vegetable soup (⅛ cup vegetables) Sweet potato wedges (⅛ cup)	Sliced kiwi (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat bread (½ ounce) **WGR**	
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Chicken enchilada: Cooked chicken (1½ ounces) and cheese (⅛ ounce)	Mashed avocado (⅛ cup) Mild veggie salsa (⅛ cup)	Cucumber salad (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Whole-corn tortilla (½ ounce) **WGR** Enriched Spanish rice (⅛ cup)	
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Broccoli quiche: Egg (½ large) and Swiss cheese (½ ounce)	Broccoli (¼ cup)	Sliced strawberries (¼ cup)	Enriched crust (½ ounce) Whole-wheat roll (¼ ounce) **WGR**	
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Roast turkey (1½ ounces)	Green peas (¼ cup)	Mashed sweet potatoes (¼ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Stuffing: Whole-grain bread (½ ounce) **WGR**	Gravy (1 Tbsp) Cranberry sauce (1 Tbsp)
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	English muffin pizza: Low-fat mozzarella cheese (1½ ounces)	Salad greens (½ cup) Pizza sauce (⅛ cup)	Fruit salad: Apples, grapes, pineapple and blueberries (¼ cup)	Whole-grain English muffin (½ ounce) **WGR**	Low-fat Italian dressing (2 teaspoons)

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Week 5

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Oven-fried chicken (1½ ounces cooked chicken)	Roasted rosemary potatoes (¼ cup)	Green peas (¼ cup)	Quinoa pilaf (¼ cup) **WGR**	
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Red beans and rice: Red beans (⅜ cup)	Mixed garden salad: Lettuce (½ cup) with carrots, tomatoes, and cucumbers (⅛ cup)	Sliced mangos (¼ cup)	Enriched white rice (¼ cup)	Low-fat dressing (2 teaspoons)
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Meatloaf (1½ ounces cooked ground beef)	Green beans (⅛ cup) Orange-glazed carrots (⅛ cup)	Red apple slices (¼ cup)	Enriched egg noodles (¼ cup) **WGR**	Ketchup (2 teaspoons)
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Barbecued pork (1½ ounces cooked pork)	Corn niblets (⅛ cup) Snap peas (⅛ cup)	Sliced green grapes (¼ cup)	Toasted whole-wheat bun (½ ounce) **WGR**	
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Fish taco: Cooked fish (1½ ounces) and shredded cheese (¼ ounce)	Shredded lettuce (¼ cup) Diced tomatoes (⅛ cup)	Fresh plum (¼ cup)	Whole-wheat tortilla (½ ounce) **WGR**	

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Week 6

Day	Milk ¾ cup	MMA 1½ oz eq	Vegetables ¼ cup	Fruits ¼ cup	Grains ½ oz eq	Additional foods
1	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Beef stew (1½ ounces cooked beef)	Vegetables in stew (¼ cup)	Applesauce (¼ cup)	Brown rice (¼ cup) **WGR**	
2	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Barbecue chicken (1½ ounces cooked)	Butternut squash (¼ cup)	Fresh peach slices (¼ cup)	Bulgar pilaf (¼ cup) **WGR**	
3	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Veggie pizza: Mozzarella cheese (1½ ounces)	Vegetables on pizza: Tomatoes, green peppers, mushrooms (⅛ cup) Carrot sticks (⅛ cup)	Mixed baby greens (½ cup) **Vegetable substitution**	Enriched pizza crust (½ ounce)	Low-fat salad dressing (2 teaspoons)
4	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Tuna noodle casserole: Tuna (1½ ounces)	Peas and carrots (⅛ cup) Steamed broccoli (¼ cup)	Watermelon (¼ cup)	Enriched egg noodles (¼ cup) Whole-grain roll (¼ ounce) **WGR**	
5	Unflavored low-fat milk (¾ cup)	Turkey sloppy joe: Cooked ground turkey (1½ ounces)	Red cabbage slaw (⅛ cup cabbage and carrots) Steamed edamame (⅛ cup)	Honeydew cubes (¼ cup)	Toasted whole-wheat bun (½ ounce) **WGR**	Low-fat salad dressing (2 teaspoons)

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Resources

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 the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program

Crediting Summary Charts for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_cacfp.pdf

Cycle Menus for Child Care: Preschoolers (Institute of Child Nutrition):
https://theicn.org/resources/1575/cycle-menus-for-child-care-preschoolers/118740/cycle-menus-for-child-care-preschoolers.pdf

Lunch and Supper ("Menu Planning" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/menu-planning#LunchSupper

Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program

Menu Planning (CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/menu-planning

Menu Planning Basics: A Guide for CACFP Operators in Child Care (Institute of Child Nutrition):
https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/menu-planning-basics-cacfp

Recipes for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE's Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning/recipes-for-child-nutrition-programs

Resources for the Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Patterns (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/resources_cacfp_meal_patterns.pdf

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For more information visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage and Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program 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/menu_cacfp_lunch_supper_cold.pdf..

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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