

Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This document summarizes the changes to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns that are required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) final rule, [*Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*](#) (89 FR 31962). These meal patterns include the CACFP meal patterns for children in child care centers, family day care homes, emergency shelters, and at-risk afterschool care programs; and the CACFP adult meal patterns for participants in adult day care centers.

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Introduction

On April 25, 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) published the final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (89 FR 31962). This rule finalizes gradual updates to the Child Nutrition Programs in several key areas, including the CACFP meal patterns.

The final rule updates include changes to the CACFP meal patterns and geographic preference. **This document includes only the meal pattern changes.** For additional guidance on all final rule requirements, refer to [USDA Memo SP 19-2024](#), [CACFP 07-2024](#), and [SFSP 12-2024: Initial Implementation Memorandum: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), and visit the “[Meal Pattern Updates](#)” section of the CSDE's [CACFP](#) webpage.

Implementation Timeline for Meal Pattern Changes

Some menu planning flexibilities take effect beginning July 1, 2024. These are indicated with the following statement: “☑ Menu planning flexibility.”

Changes to CACFP menus or operations are not required until program year 2025-26 (beginning October 1, 2025). This document identifies the changes that occur in each program year.

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Updates to CACFP Meal Patterns

The chart below summarizes the final rule changes that apply to the CACFP meal patterns for children and the CACFP adult meal patterns for participants in adult day care centers.

For guidance on the meal pattern and crediting requirements for the CACFP meal patterns for children, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage. A summary of the meal pattern crediting requirements is provided in the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Summary Charts for the CACFP Meal Patterns for Children](#).

For guidance on the meal pattern and crediting requirements for the CACFP adult meal patterns, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpage. A summary of the meal pattern crediting requirements is provided in the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Summary Charts for the CACFP Adult Meal Patterns](#).

Requirements	Effective July 1, 2024	Effective October 1, 2025
Terminology update for meal components	Changes the previous references in the regulations for Child Nutrition Programs from "food component" to "meal component." Adds the following definition for meal component: " <i>Meal component</i> means one of the food groups which comprise reimbursable meals. The meal components are: fruits, vegetables, grains, meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk."	None

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Requirements	Effective July 1, 2024	Effective October 1, 2025
Milk component	<p>Allowable types of milk: Continues to allow fat-free and low-fat milk (flavored and unflavored) for participants ages 6 and older.</p> <p>Nutrition standard for fluid milk substitutes: Updates the units for vitamin A and vitamin D requirements for fluid milk substitutes to align with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) labeling requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For vitamin A, instead of 500 IUs, the unit requirement is now 150 mcg retinol activity equivalents (RAE) per 8 fluid ounces. For vitamin D, instead of 100 IUs, the unit requirement is now 2.5 mcg per 8 fluid ounces. <p>The amount of vitamin A and vitamin D required in fluid milk substitutes does not change; only the unit of measurement has changed to conform to FDA labeling requirements.</p> <p>For more information for child care programs, refer to the CSDE's resources, Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p> <p>For more information for adult day care centers, refer to the CSDE's resources, Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons for Adult Participants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p>	None

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Requirements	Effective July 1, 2024	Effective October 1, 2025
Vegetables component	Terminology update for beans, peas, and lentils: Changes the previous references in the regulations for Child Nutrition Programs from “legumes (beans and peas)” to “beans, peas, and lentils.” For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the Child and Adult Care Food Program .	None
Fruits component	None	None
Meats/meat alternates (MMA) component	<p>Quantities for MMA: Updates the MMA quantities from ounces to ounce equivalents (oz eq). The amount of MMA that credits as 1 oz eq is the same.</p> <p>Nuts and seeds: Allows nuts and seeds to credit for the full MMA component in all meals and snacks, removing the previous 50 percent crediting limit for nuts and seeds at lunch and supper. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menu planning flexibility</p>	<p>Yogurt: Changes the product-based limit for yogurt from total sugars to added sugars. Yogurt cannot exceed 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce). With state agency approval, CACFP operators may choose to implement the added sugars limit prior to October 1, 2025.</p> <p>For current crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, Crediting Yogurt in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p>

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Grains component	<p>WGR definition: Adds the following WGR definition in CACFP regulations: “Whole grain-rich is the term designated by FNS to indicate that the grain content of a product is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain with any remaining grains being enriched.” This definition does not change the meaning of WGR. CACFP operators can continue to identify WGR products as described in current USDA guidance. For guidance on identifying WGR foods, refer to the CSDE’s Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p> <p>CACFP operators must continue to offer at least one WGR serving of grains per day.</p> <p>Substituting vegetables for grains in tribal communities: Allows institutions and facilities that serve primarily American Indian or Alaska Native participants to substitute vegetables for grains.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menu planning flexibility</p>	<p>Breakfast cereals: Changes the product-based limit for breakfast cereals from total sugars to added sugars. Breakfast cereals cannot exceed 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce. With state agency approval, CACFP operators may choose to implement the added sugars limit prior to October 1, 2025.</p> <p>For current crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.</p>

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Requirements	Effective July 1, 2024	Effective October 1, 2025
Meal modifications	<p>Terminology update: Changes the previous references in the regulations for Child Nutrition Programs from “medical authority” to “state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian.”</p> <p>Definition of state licensed healthcare professional: Defines a state licensed healthcare professional as an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under state law. In Connecticut, this includes licensed physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA) and certified physician assistants (PAC), doctors of osteopathy (DO), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN).</p> <p>CACFP regulations: Updates and reorganizes the regulatory text to distinguish between disability and non-disability requests more clearly. Encourages CACFP operators to meet participants’ non-disability dietary preferences when planning and preparing CACFP meals and snacks.</p> <p>For more information for child care programs, refer to the CSDE’s Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs and visit the CSDE’s Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs webpage.</p> <p>For more information for adult day care centers, refer to the CSDE’s Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers and visit the CSDE’s Special Diets in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers webpage.</p>	<p>Medical statements from registered dietitians: Outlines in regulation that state licensed healthcare professionals and registered dietitians may write medical statements to request meal modifications on behalf of participants with disabilities. Requires CACFP operators to accept medical statements from registered dietitians by October 1, 2025. CACFP operators may choose to implement this change prior to this deadline.</p>

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For more information, visit the “[Meal Pattern Updates](#)” section of the CSDE's [CACFP](#) 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/summary_final_rule_snp_CACFP_meal_patterns.pdf.

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