

Self-assessment of Child Care Practices for Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This tool is intended to help child 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) assess current practices for meal modifications and identify areas in need of improvement.

- **Required modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet:** The USDA’s nondiscrimination regulations ([7 CFR 15b](#)) and CACFP regulations ([7 CFR 226.20\(g\)](#)) require reasonable meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet, based on written documentation from a recognized medical authority. A recognized medical authority is a state-licensed healthcare professional authorized to write medical prescriptions under state law, i.e., physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA) and certified physician assistants (PAC), doctors of osteopathy (DO), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN). For guidance on the meal modification requirements for children with a disability, refer to section 2 of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs](#). Additional resources and medical statement forms are available on the CSDE’s [Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage.
- **Optional modifications for children without a disability:** CACFP facilities may choose to make optional modifications within the CACFP meal patterns on a case-by-case basis for children whose dietary restrictions are not related to a disability. A medical statement is required if these optional modifications are outside the school meal patterns. For information on the CACFP meal patterns, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage and review the CSDE’s [Guide to Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements for CACFP Child Care Programs](#).

Step 1 — Assessment. Check the appropriate box to indicate if each practice is fully implemented, partially implemented, or not implemented by the CACFP facility. Refer to the CACFP facility’s policies, guidelines, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for special diets and meal modifications. Check “Not known” if additional information is needed to determine whether the CACFP facility implements the practice.

Federal and state requirements	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	Not known
1. The CACFP facility complies with the federal requirements for meal modifications including the USDA CACFP regulations (7 CFR 226), USDA nondiscrimination regulations (7 CFR 15b), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the ADA Amendments Act . For more information, refer to section 1 of the CSDE’s Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs .				
2. The CACFP facility makes reasonable meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet, based on the medical statement signed by a recognized medical authority. The medical statement identifies: 1) how the child’s physical or mental impairment restricts the child’s diet; 2) an explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child; and 3) the food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives, if appropriate. The CSDE’s Medical Statement for Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs is available in English and Spanish in the “ Documents/Forms ” section of the CSDE’s Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs webpage.				

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Federal and state requirements, continued	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	Not known
3. The CACFP facility maintains a medical statement for each child who requires a meal modification due to a disability. Note: A separate medical statement is not required if the child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan that includes the required information (refer to item 2), or the required information is obtained during the development or review of the IEP or 504 Plan.				
4. When identifying children during the meal service who require modified meals and snacks due to a disability, the CACFP facility implements policies and practices that protect children’s privacy and maintain the confidentiality of each child’s medical condition. For more information, refer to “Identifying Children” in section 2 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> .				
5. Optional modified meals and snacks for children without a disability comply with the CACFP meal patterns unless a medical statement is provided. Examples of optional modifications include requests related to religious or moral convictions, general health concerns, and personal food preferences, such as a family’s preference that their child eats a gluten-free diet or organic foods because they believe it is healthier.				
6. Optional milk substitutions for children without a disability include only lactose-free or lactose-reduced milk with the appropriate fat content for each age group and nondairy milk substitutes that meet the USDA’s nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes. For child care centers in public schools, nondairy milk substitutes also comply with the state beverage requirements of Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.). For more information, refer to section 3 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> , and the CSDE’s resource, <i>Allowable Milk Substitutes for Children without Disabilities in the CACFP</i> . Note: For children without a disability, CACFP facilities can never substitute any other beverages for milk (such as juice, water, and nutrition supplement beverages), even with a medical statement signed by a recognized medical authority.				
7. The CACFP facility takes appropriate precautions to prepare and serve safe meals and snacks for children with food allergies. Procedures are in place to:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a food allergy action plan for each child with a life-threatening food allergy; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check ingredients for all foods served to children with food allergies; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designate an area in the kitchen for allergen-free meals and snacks, and use separate equipment and utensils during preparation, cooking, and serving; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement cleaning procedures to prevent cross-contact of possible allergens; and 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide annual and ongoing training for staff, including management of children with life-threatening food allergies and administration of epinephrine autoinjectors. 				
8. The CACFP facility maintains current nutrition information for foods and beverages served in CACFP meals and snacks, which is available to children (when developmentally appropriate), parents and guardians, recognized medical authorities, and appropriate staff, as needed. For more information, refer to “Nutrition Information” in section 2 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> .				

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Team	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	Not known
9. The CACFP facility includes a team of appropriate individuals in the planning and implementation of meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet. Examples of team members include program administrator, sponsoring organization representative, health consultant (e.g., nurse), registered dietitian, disability coordinator, and other individuals with relevant experience.				
10. The team develops and communicates the CACFP facility’s policy and procedures for meal modifications.				
Written policy and procedures	Full	Partial	None	Not known
11. The CACFP facility has a written policy addressing the requirements and procedures for meal modifications in the CACFP. For more information, refer to section 5 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> .				
12. The CACFP facility has written SOPs for meal modifications, such as:				
• preparing foods for special diets, e.g., texture modifications, food allergies, celiac disease, and diabetes;				
• reviewing menus, reading food labels, and making nutrition information available to children (when developmentally appropriate), parents and guardians, recognized medical authorities, and appropriate staff, as needed.				
• cleaning to prevent cross-contact of possible food allergens;				
• handwashing to prevent cross-contact of possible food allergens;				
• ensuring that CACFP facility staff and food service staff regularly communicate and collaborate regarding the planning and implementation of meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet;				
• obtaining consultation services (such as a registered dietitian) as needed, to plan meals and snacks for children whose disability restrict their diet; and				
• training for food service staff and all applicable CACFP facility staff (including substitutes) involved with planning, preparing, and serving CACFP meals and snacks.				
13. CACFP facilities with 15 or more employees: The CACFP facility designates at least one person to coordinate compliance with the disability requirements of the USDA nondiscrimination regulations (7 CFR 15b.6). For more information, refer to section 5 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> . Note: For CACFP facilities with less than 15 employees, the USDA recommends having someone on staff who can provide technical assistance to centers and family day care homes when they are making meal modifications for children with disabilities.				
14. CACFP facilities with 15 or more employees: As required by the USDA nondiscrimination regulations (7 CFR 15b.6(b)), the CACFP facility has written grievance procedures that incorporate appropriate due process standards and that provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints. For more information, refer to section 5 of the CSDE’s <i>Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs</i> .				

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Communication, continued	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	Not known
15. The CACFP facility regularly communicates with all food service and applicable child care staff regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the requirements for meal modifications; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the CACFP facility’s policy and SOPs for meal modifications; and 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the individual accommodations for each child whose disability requires a meal modification; 				
16. The CACFP facility regularly communicates with parents and guardians regarding meal modifications for children, including:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the CACFP facility’s policy and SOPs for managing meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procedures for parents and guardians to request meal modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet, including how to complete the medical statement (items 2 and 3); 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procedures for obtaining nutrition information for CACFP meals and snacks (item 8); and 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procedural rights for grievance procedures (item 14), 				
17. The CACFP facility’s policy and SOPs for meal modifications are posted on the CACFP facility’s website and shared with children (when developmentally appropriate) and parents/guardians through other means, such as parent handbooks, newsletters, e-mails, handouts, menu backs, bulletin boards and displays, meetings, child care program events, and public service announcements.				
Professional Development	Full	Partial	None	Not known
18. Food service personnel receive professional development on accommodating special diets at least annually.				
19. Professional development for food service personnel includes training on:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the USDA requirements for meal modifications and documentation, i.e., medical statement, IEP, or Section 504 Plan (items 1-3); 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • types of special diets and required modifications for menus and recipes; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to read food labels for nutrition information and ingredients; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cleaning and handwashing procedures to prevent cross-contact of possible food allergens; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning, preparing, and serving safe and snacks; 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to implement the CACFP facility’s policy and SOPs for meal modifications (items 11-14); and 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procedures for maintaining the confidentiality of each child’s medical condition during the meal service (item 4). 				
20. CACFP facility staff receives professional development about meal modifications, as appropriate to their job responsibilities (e.g., administrators, health consultants, teachers, teacher’s aides, bus drivers, and other child care staff).				

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Monitoring and review	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	Not known
21. The CACFP facility implements monitoring procedures to ensure that all applicable staff consistently follows the policy and SOPs for meal modifications.				
22. The CACFP facility implements monitoring procedures to ensure that meal modifications are reasonable, appropriate, and meet each child's dietary needs.				
23. The CACFP facility reviews the policy and SOPs for meal modifications at least annually, and makes changes as needed.				

Step 2 — Prioritize the areas for change. Review the areas rated “none” or “partial” and identify the priority areas for change in the CACFP facility.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Step 3 — Develop an action plan for each priority area. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s [Action Planning Form](#) and sample completed forms, [Sample Action Plan: Developing Policy for Meal Modifications in the CACFP](#) and [Sample Action Plan: Promoting Policy for Meal Modifications in the CACFP](#).

Resources

Action Planning Form (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/SpecDiet/Action_Planning_Form.docx

Allowable Milk Substitutes for Children without Disabilities in the CACFP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Milk_Substitutes_CACFP.pdf

CACFP Meal Patterns for Children (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/MealPattern/CACFP_Meal_Pattern.pdf

CACFP Meal Patterns for Infants (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/Infants/Infant_Meal_Pattern_CACFP.pdf

CSDE Operational Memorandum 2C-18 and 2H-18: Requirements for Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/Memos/OM2018/OM02C18_02H18.pdf

Feeding Infants in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Feeding-Infants-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs>

Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Guide_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.pdf

Guide to Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements for CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/MealPattern/Guide_CACFP_Meal_Patterns.pdf

Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs>

Medical Statements for CACFP Child Care Programs (“Documents/Forms” section of CSDE’s Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Special-Diets-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Documents#MedicalStatements>

Requirements for Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE presentation):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Meal_Modifications_CACFP_Presentation.pdf

Sample Action Plan: Developing Policy for Meal Modifications in the CACFP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Action_Policy_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.pdf

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Sample Action Plan: Promoting Policy for Meal Modifications in the CACFP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Action_Promote_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.pdf

Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Special-Diets-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs>

Summary of Requirements for Meal Modifications for Children in the CACFP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Summary_Chart_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.pdf

USDA Memo CACFP 14-2017 and SFSP 10-2017: Modifications to Accommodate Disabilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/modifications-accommodate-disabilities-cacfp-and-sfsp>

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Special Diets in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) 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/SpecDiet/Assessment_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.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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