

# Healthy Tips for Child Meals

## In CACFP Day Care Programs

For some children, the food they eat at the CACFP day care program will be the tastiest and healthiest food they will have all day. Children have their own special needs when supporting good health through nutrition.



### Portion Sizes That Fit:

Preschoolers need small portions; about one tablespoon of each type of food for every year of a child's age is an ample portion size. There are other advantages, such as:

- Small portions are a much less intimidating way to present new and unique food flavors that continue to be introduced into the diet.
- Serving appropriate portion sizes reduces overproduction and potential plate waste after a meal.
- Serve meals family style to allow the caregiver opportunities to talk about tasting new foods, to encourage children to take a small portion to taste, and to demonstrate how to enjoy a nutritious meal.



### Try and Try Again:

- It may take up to 12 attempts (or more) for a young child to taste or like a new food, especially unfamiliar foods.
- As children grow and develop, so does their taste buds. Don't assume if they did not like it once, they'll never like it.
- Offer new foods prepared in a variety of different ways. Serve bite size portions that are easy for little ones to pick-up and pop into their mouths.
- Young children tend to prefer raw, crunchy vegetables over hot ones and finger foods over foods that require utensils.



Food and Nutrition Division  
Child and Adult Care Food Program



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# Tips for Providing Meals to Children

## In CACFP Day Care Programs

Read the following tips when planning, preparing and serving your menus for children.



### Food Safety Tips:

Keeping your preschooler safe is your number one priority. Building safe habits will be valuable throughout their lives. Follow these simple tips to keep food safe and clean for your preschooler:

- Preschoolers should wash their hands after using the bathroom, before and after eating, after playing with pets, or whenever they are dirty.
- Sing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or the “Alphabet” song or count for 20 seconds each time they wash their hands to make sure your child is washing long enough.
- Keep food and surfaces clean. Wash surfaces before and after you prepare foods like fish, meat, eggs, and cheese for your preschooler.
- Some foods are hard to swallow or can be a choking hazard, so cut them into smaller pieces, about 1/2 inch. Such foods can include peanuts, hot dog frankfurters, whole grapes, large spoonfuls of nut butters, and cherry tomatoes.
- To prevent choking, have your preschoolers sit down when they eat. Avoid letting them run, walk, play, or lie down with food in their mouth. Watch how preschoolers eat.



### Variety:

- Provide variety by offering less common vegetables like sweet potatoes, red bell pepper strips, butternut squash, pumpkin, or acorn squash.
- Use a combination of fresh, frozen and canned to balance cost and variety.
- Make smoothies rather than serve juice. Smoothies can be easier to digest and are more nutritious. Try adding frozen spinach and blueberries to a yogurt smoothie.



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### Substitution:

- Stay within the same color group when substituting vegetables and ensure that a variety of colors served throughout the week. For example, substitute broccoli with another dark green vegetable such as Romaine lettuce, kale, mustard or turnip greens, or Brussels sprouts.
- Use low-cost beans or peas like lima beans, black beans, pinto beans, kidney beans, black-eye peas, navy beans, or sugar snap peas in different cooking methods such as chili, soup, baked beans, and different sauces to mix it up.
- Keep extra servings of vegetables in a frozen or canned capacity for unexpected menu substitutions.
- If substituting a whole grain-rich menu item replace it with other whole grain-rich grains like oats, whole corn, brown rice, whole wheat, millet, and quinoa.
- Citrus is in season during the winter. Try to substitute citrus fruit with another citrus fruit, so for orange wedges, serve grapefruit, pineapple, tangerine, tangelo, or mandarin orange.



### Color & Presentation:

- Put dark purple and blue fruits on the menu such as blueberries, blackberries, purple plums, and purple grapes, which are beneficial for brain health.
- Feature brightly colored vegetables, such as carrots, spinach, sweet potatoes, yellow squash, tomatoes and red and orange bell peppers to add visual appeal to the plate.

