

CACFP 4-Week Cycle Menus Tip Sheet for Children

The 4-week cycle menus for CACFP meet the requirements for the upgraded meal patterns that take effect October 1, 2017. The menus are examples for you to use as is or modify to fit your program needs. Read over the tips below when planning, preparing and serving your menus. For additional help contact your local Education Service Center (ESC).

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:

- Preschools should wash their hands after using the bathroom, before and after eating, after playing with pets, or whenever they are dirty. Preschoolers are less likely to get sick if they wash their hands often. Make handwashing fun! Sing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or the “Alphabet” song or count for 20 seconds each time to make sure your child is washing long enough. Offer them a favorite soap to keep them interested.
- Young children can easily get sick because their immune systems are not fully developed. 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 cut them into small pieces, about 1/2 inch. Hard-to-swallow foods can include peanuts, hot dog frankfurters, whole grapes, and cherry tomatoes
- Watch how preschoolers eat. 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.



How to Modify the Menus

Vegetables – stay within the same color group – if substituting for broccoli then provide another dark green vegetable: Romaine lettuce, kale, mustard or turnip greens, Brussel sprouts etc.; if a red-orange vegetable needs a substitute then carrots, sweet potatoes, red bell pepper strips, tomatoes, butternut squash, pumpkin, or acorn squash fit the need; if dried beans or peas is being used as a vegetable on the menu then substitute another dried bean or pea: lima beans , black bean, pinto bean, kidney bean, black-eye peas, navy bean, pork & bean, baked bean, or sugar snap peas. Keep extra servings of vegetables in a frozen or canned capacity for unexpected menu substitutions.

Fruits – substitute citrus fruit with another citrus fruit; for orange wedges – serve grapefruit, pineapple, tangerine, tangelo, or mandarin orange. Serve a variety of colorful fruits – include dark purple and blue for the highest nutrient intake (blueberries, blackberries, purple plums, and purple grapes). Children’s all-time favorites are good (bananas and apples) but remember to mix it up with berries, citrus, and melons. Use a combination of fresh, frozen and canned to balance cost and variety. Keep extra servings of fruit in a frozen or canned capacity for unexpected menu substitutions. Limit juice to once daily.

Grains and Breads – serve at least one whole grain-rich food daily – an extra serving or two is even better. If substituting a whole grain-rich menu item be sure to replace it with one; look for whole grain items – oats, whole corn, brown rice, whole wheat, and quinoa.

