



Plan for Success: Afterschool Meal Programs and the Updated CACFP Meal Pattern

The Afterschool Meal Program, offered through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), provides federal funding to afterschool programs operating in a low-income area to serve meals and snacks to children ages 18 and younger. The nutritious meals and snacks attract children to out-of-school time programs, which may run after school, on weekends, and during school holidays. Through CACFP, the Afterschool Meal Program offers a safe environment where children can be active, engaged, and nourished while their parents are at work, resulting in their healthy growth and development.

Reimbursable meals and snacks must meet federal nutrition standards. In April 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued rules updating the [nutrition standards](#) for meals served through CACFP. This resource is meant to be a roadmap for sites to understand and plan for the new meal pattern and identify nutrition enrichment activities to empower families, support staff, and engage children.

Did you know?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a great foundation for out-of-school time programs implementing the [National Afterschool Association \(NAA\) Standards for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity \(HEPA\)](#). Through HEPA, programs are encouraged to serve foods and beverages that promote lifelong health and help prevent chronic diseases.

Timeline for Implementation

Afterschool programs that provide meals through CACFP must have the new meal pattern in place by *October 1, 2017*. However, programs should not wait until then to start making healthy changes! USDA released a [memorandum](#) that outlines options for implementing the updated meal pattern requirements prior to that deadline.

Making the New Meal Pattern Work

The new meal pattern makes a good program even better. By offering meals consistent with [U.S. Dietary Guidelines](#), afterschool programs will provide millions of low-income children with better access to much-needed fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lower-fat dairy foods — all of which help support children’s health and fuel them for activity and learning during afterschool programming.

CACFP Afterschool Meals: Old and New Meal Patterns		
Food Item	Old	New
Milk (low fat or fat free)	1 cup	1 cup
Meat/Meat Alternative	2 ounces	2 ounces
Vegetables	¾ cup	½ cup
Fruits		¼ cup
Whole Grains	1 serving	1 ounce equivalent

Here are expected changes as well as resources and tips to successfully implement them.

More Choice, Less Waste

- **What’s changed?** The new meal pattern extends Offer Versus Serve (OVS) to all Afterschool Meal Programs, even those not working with a School Food Authority. OVS allows students to decline some of the food offered in an afterschool meal, giving students the ability to choose their preferred foods, which helps programs reduce food waste.
- **Actions:** Educate your program staff about the OVS option. If you run OVS through the Summer Nutrition Programs, begin thinking about how you could make it work in afterschool programs as well.
- **Helpful resources:** Looking for a youth engagement activity to foster youth choice? [Food and Fun](#) has everything you need to host your own taste test. [Eating Healthy on a Budget](#) will help your staff and families avoid waste and stretch their food dollar at the same time.

Go for Whole Grains

- **What’s changed?** Whole grains are an important source of dietary fiber, B vitamins, and minerals, and soon, the Afterschool Meal Program will include more of them! At least one serving of grains per day must be whole grain-rich. Additionally, grain-based desserts (such as cookies and granola bars) will no longer count towards the grains component. Sweet crackers (such as graham crackers and animal crackers) will be creditable under the new meal pattern.

- **Actions:** Begin to incorporate more whole grains into menus this school year. Start small, with whole grains being served once or twice a week. Serve only those grain products that have the word “whole” in the ingredient statement.
- **Helpful resources:** Spread the word! Post [Tips to Help You Eat Whole Grains](#) in your staff break room, newsletters, or distribute at your next family meeting. Try [“Make Flour”](#) for a simple hands-on activity to demonstrate the difference between whole grain and refined flour.

Variety of Fruits and Vegetables

- **What’s changed?** The new meal pattern separates fruits and vegetables into two different meal components. Programs may choose to serve two vegetables per meal, rather than a serving of vegetables and a serving of fruit. Juice can only be served to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal per day, including snacks.
- **Actions:** Start reviewing menus to determine where fruits and vegetables can be added. Survey participating children to determine favorite fruits and vegetables and where nutrition education can play a bigger role.
- **Helpful resources:** Build community connections and try new foods! Host a fruit and vegetable [potluck](#). Encourage families to create a [“Grocery Game Plan”](#) to integrate more fruits and vegetables throughout the week. Make it a year-long adventure with [Foods of the Month](#) from the National Recreation and Park Association.

Healthy Bones and Hydration

- **What’s changed?** Milk served to children ages 6 and older can be unflavored low-fat (1 percent), unflavored fat-free (skim), or flavored fat-free (skim) milk. The new meal pattern also requires drinking water to be offered to children throughout the day in addition to the current requirement to make it available at meal times.
- **Actions:** Begin implementation by ensuring water is accessible and available to children at all times during afterschool programming.
- **Helpful resources:** [Help Kids Drink More Water: 8 Ideas to Try](#) and [Make Better Beverage Choices](#) include tips on encouraging children to choose water over sugary drinks. Looking for activities? Try [Food and Fun Hydration](#).

Just in: New Age Group

- **What’s changed?** The new meal pattern established a new age group for menu planning: older children ages 13 to 18 years old. According to USDA, these categories are consistent with nutritional needs, enable programs to provide age-appropriate meals, and allow for reasonable flexibility.

- *Helpful resources:* Raise youth voices with the free 8-session [empowerME4Life](#) youth leadership curriculum, where older youth teach younger students to understand the benefits of fruits and vegetables and how to read a food label.

More Resources and Best Practices

- [FRAC Afterschool Nutrition Program Page](#)
- FRAC Webinar Recording: [New Healthier CACFP Meal Standards: What you need to know](#)
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation [Smart Food Planner](#)
- [USDA: Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Pattern Revision: Best Practices](#)
- [MyPlate.Gov](#)
- [Healthy Out-of-School Time Blog](#) featuring enrichment activities and success stories from the field
- [National AfterSchool Association Healthy Eating and Physical Activity \(HEPA\) Standards](#)