

Meal Patterns for Children in Child Care Programs

When good eating habits and positive attitudes toward food are established at an early age, the chance of an individual enjoying optimal health throughout life is increased. For young children, eating a nutritionally balanced diet is essential if they are to grow and develop normally.

Daily nutrient intake judged by the National Research Council to be adequate for maintaining good nutrition has been formulated and called Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). The RDA is based on age, sex, weight, and height of an individual.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed for use by the Child Care Food Program meal patterns for breakfast/supplement/lunch that equal approximately 1/3 of the RDA. The meal patterns are based of the premise that if the meal pattern is followed, the food consumed will be equal to approximately 1/3 of the RDA.

The Child Day Care Commission approved use of the USDA meal patterns as the minimum amount of food which can be served to comply with the licensing standards for adequate nutrition. This publication is intended to assist centers and homes with the preparation of the correct quantities of food. The following meal patterns contain the minimum food components needed to comply with licensing requirements:

	Children 1 up to 3 years	Children 1 up to 6 years	Children 3 up to 12 years	Children 6 up
Breakfast:				
Milk, fluid		1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Juice or fruit or vegetable		1/4 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Bread, enriched or whole grain; or		1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice
Cereal, cold, dry, or		1/4 cup ¹	1/3 cup ²	3/4 cup ³
Hot cooked		1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Midmorning or Midafternoon Snack (supplement):				
(Select 2 of these 4 components)				
Milk, fluid		1/2 cup	1/2 cup	1 cup
Meat or meat alternate		1/2 ounce	1/2 ounce	1 ounce
Juice or fruit or vegetable		1/2 cup	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Bread, enriched or whole grain; or		1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice
Cereal, cold, dry, or		1/4 cup ¹	1/3 cup ²	3/4 cup ³
Hot cooked		1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Lunch or Supper:				
Milk, fluid		1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Meat or meat alternate				
Meat, poultry, or fish, cooked (lean meat without bone)		1 ounce	1 1/2 ounces	2 ounces
Meat alternates				
Cheese		1 ounce	1 1/2 ounces	2 ounces
Egg		1	1	1
Cooked dry beans and peas		1/4 cup	3/8 cup	1/2 cup
Peanut butter		2 Tbsp.	3 Tbsp.	4 Tbsp.
Vegetable and/or fruit (two or more)		1/4 cup	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Bread or bread alternate; enriched or whole grain		1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice

¹ 1/4 cup (volume) or 1/3 ounce (weight), whichever is less.

² 1/3 cup (volume) or 1/2 ounce (weight), whichever is less.

³ 3/4 cup (volume) or 1 ounce (weight), whichever is less.