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Nebraska's Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Pattern for Infants

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A baby's developmental readiness determines which foods should be fed, what texture the foods should be, and which feeding styles to use. All babies develop at their own rate. Although age and size often correspond with developmental readiness, these should not be used as sole considerations for deciding what and how to feed babies. It is important to be aware of their rapidly developing mouth patterns and hand and body control so that you know the appropriate food and texture to serve the babies and the appropriate feeding style to use at each stage of their development.

The rate at which the baby progresses to each new food texture and feeding style is determined by the baby's own skills and attitudes. Babies always do better if they are allowed to progress at their own rate.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Infant Meal Pattern allows for a gradual introduction of solid foods and encourages breastfeeding or formula feeding up to the first birthday. The texture and amount of the feeding should be consistent with the age of the infant. For emotional, nutritional and physical growth, infants need foods rich in nutrients. Foods such as strained meat, fruit, vegetables, iron-fortified dry infant cereal and breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula provide the maximum amount of vitamins and minerals for growing babies. Commercial foods such as combination or mixed baby foods are not creditable because water often is listed as the first ingredient, and it is difficult to determine from the ingredient label the actual amounts of the food components in the product.

There are ranges given for each food portion in the meal pattern to allow for flexibility in how much food is served to the baby based on its appetite. Babies will vary day to day in the amounts they eat. The amounts listed are the minimum portions you must serve to meet the requirements. Some babies will want more than these amounts. You may serve larger portions and additional foods to those babies. Other babies may want less than the minimum portions listed here.

Never force babies to finish what is in the bottle or what is fed by spoon. Let babies determine how much they eat. Babies will let you know if they are hungry by opening their mouths and leaning forward. They will let you know if they have had enough to eat by pulling away from the bottle or spoon, turning their heads away, playing with the food, sealing their lips, or pushing the nipple or food

out of their mouths. Babies may want to eat less if they are teething or not feeling well and more if they are going through a growth spurt.

In the meal pattern, the portions for solid foods are listed as zero to 3 tablespoons in the 4- through 7-month age group. Solid foods are optional in this age group and should be served only when babies are developmentally ready for them and interested in learning to eat them.

The age to introduce solid foods is likely to be the area of greatest discrepancy between the child care provider and parents. Some parents start serving solid foods before their baby is developmentally ready; others wait beyond the time of developmental readiness. It is important to let the parents decide when to introduce solid foods.

CACFP Meal Pattern Requirement for Infants

(The meal pattern states breakfast, lunch, supper and snacks, but these are only guidelines. When babies are hungry, feed them.)

Age of Baby by Month	*Breakfast*	*Lunch and Supper*	*Snack*
Birth through 3 months	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]
4 months through 7 months	4-8 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]	4-8 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]	4-8 fluid ounces breast milk[1] or formula[2]
	0-3 tablespoons infant cereal[3] (optional)	0-3 tablespoons infant cereal[3] (optional)	
		0-3 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable (optional)	
8 months through 11 months	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk, formula[2] or whole milk	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk, formula[2] or whole milk	2-4 fluid ounces breast milk, formula[2], whole milk or fruit juice[4]
	2-4 tablespoons infant cereal[3] 1-4 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable	2-4 tablespoons infant cereal[3]**and/or** 1-4 tablespoons meat, fish, poultry, egg yolk or cooked dry beans or peas, **or** 1/2-2 ounces cheese, **or** 1-4 ounces cottage cheese, cheese food, or cheese spread.	0-1/2 slice bread or 0-2 crackers (optional)
		1-4 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable	

[1]Meals containing only breast milk are not reimbursable.
[2]Iron-fortified infant formula.
[3]Iron-fortified dry infant cereal.

[4]Full-strength fruit juice.
[5]Made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour.

Commonly Asked Questions About The CACFP Infant Meal Pattern

Question: Must a young infant eat at only the specified meal times?
Answer: The meal pattern states breakfast, lunch, supper and snack, but that is only a guideline. Young babies may need to eat every two to four hours. Older babies also may need to eat more frequently than the specified times. When babies are hungry, feed them.

Question: How can you serve zero tablespoons of food?
Answer: Certain foods are listed as zero tablespoons to let you know that the food is optional and should be served at your discretion. Also, you may serve less than 1 tablespoon of those foods.

Question: Why are some of the food portions so small?
Answer: The portions listed are the minimum amounts which meet the requirements. You may serve larger portions to those babies who would like more.

Question: Which infant formulas can be served?
Answer: All infant formulas, including soy-based formulas, may be served as long as they are iron-fortified and served according to the directions on the label.

For more information on how to qualify for reimbursement contact: Nebraska Department of Education, Nutrition Services, Telephone (402) 471-2488; (800) 731-2233.

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