



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

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Understanding the Meat Alternate Component

Child Care Programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) are required to have a meat or meat alternate component as a part of a meal in order to be considered a reimbursable meal. To qualify as a reimbursable meal, a meat or meat alternate must be served in the main dish or as the main dish to make sure children get adequate protein to help them grow. Meat and meat alternates are an important aspect of any meal served because they provide essential nutrients. This food

component typically provides appropriate amounts of protein, iron, and B vitamins including niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, and other important nutrients. These nutrients are important for energy, growth, and the formation of body tissues. When meat is not used as the source of these nutrients, it is important to serve the appropriate meat alternates.



Some meat alternates include:

- eggs,
- cheese,
- low-fat yogurt,
- beans and peas, and
- nuts or nut butters.

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Understanding the Meat Alternate Component

For additional meat alternates, check out the USDA's Crediting Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/crediting-handbook-child-and-adult-care-food-program>.

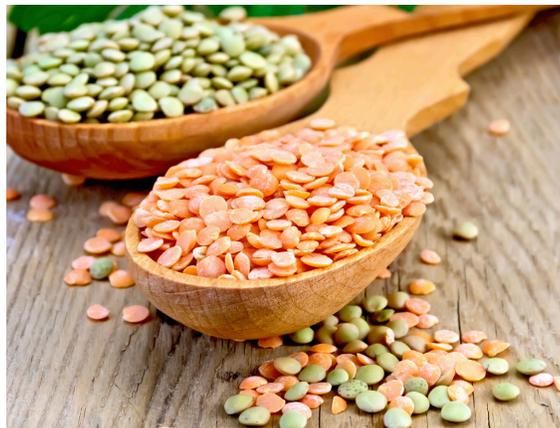
When incorporating meat alternates into the menu, it is important to make sure it is a complete protein source because they are necessary for the body to function properly. So, what does it mean to be a complete protein source? It means that the menu item or the meal is made up of all the essential amino acids, which are the smallest forms of a protein. Animal sources of protein naturally contain complete amino acids with a few exceptions including many meat alternates. Cheese is an example of a meat alternate that provides complete protein. Other examples of complete proteins include eggs, low-fat milk, and other dairy products.



The meat portion can be the most expensive part of the meal cost. Using meat alternates can be a cost effective and healthy solution. Dry beans, for example, are high in protein and are inexpensive which make them a good option. Using meat alternates throughout a menu cycle can benefit food cost, while providing optimal nutrition for the meals served.



If a meat alternate is not a complete source of amino acids, it can be combined with another food to become a complete source. This combination is often referred to as a complementary protein. Some examples include pairing grains with legumes or grains with dairy. For instance, when beans and corn are incorporated into a menu item, it is a complete source of protein.





Fruit of the Month: Sapotes

The unique fruit, sapote (sa•po•te) is sweet with a juicy and custard-like, creamy flesh. The flavor is mild and is similar to coconut, lemon, and vanilla. It is often used as an ingredient in ice cream because of its unique flavor and smooth texture. However, if picked or purchased overripe, the flavor can be bitter and unpleasant. It is a circular fruit that can range from green to yellow based on maturity. Sapotes are very nutritious being an excellent source of fiber, vitamins A, B₃, C, copper, and magnesium. They are also a good source of vitamin B₆, folate, pantothenic acid, iron, and potassium. Sapotes should be selected with no bruises or blemishes and stored at room temperature. They are grown mostly in California. Although, it is not a common fruit, it can be purchased in markets throughout the United States.

Nutrition Tip

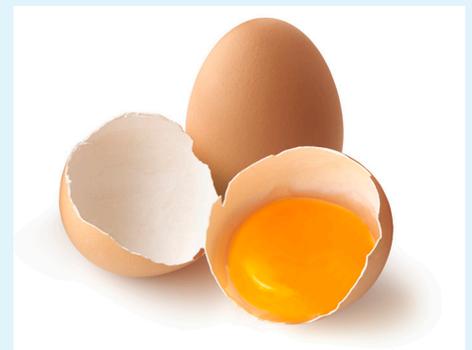
Sugar consumption is one of the largest contributors to childhood obesity. Many food products on the market have added sugar that may not be recognizable. It is important to read food labels and ingredient lists to guarantee excess sugar is not being consumed by children.

When selecting food for meals or snacks, make sure products are labeled with either “no added sugar,” “unsweetened,” or “no high-fructose corn syrup”. These foods include canned fruits, which can be packed in the fruits’ own juice or water. Other foods include applesauce, oatmeal, and bread products. So select food products that are either in their natural state with no added sugar or unsweetened.

Nutrition Fact

Did you know a single egg has 13 essential vitamins and nutrients? It contains no saturated fat, and it is a high-quality protein source. The cholesterol in an egg does not increase cholesterol in the body after consumed. In fact there are only 185 mg of cholesterol in a large egg, so eggs are a part of a healthy diet. Although the average daily intake recommendation for cholesterol is 300 mg, dietary cholesterol does not contribute automatically to high levels in the blood.

The health benefits of eggs can be yours for a total of 70 calories per large egg. Eating an egg can help with body functions such as brain and eye development, muscle strength and repair, and even weight management by keeping you fuller longer. Being extremely versatile, eggs can be cooked and prepared in different ways. They can be boiled, scrambled, poached, or baked in many recipes. Try a new recipe for “egg-cellent” nutrition!



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