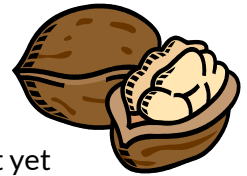


Preschool Meal Pattern *In a Nutshell*



Similar to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern, the preschool meal pattern is intended for school food authorities (SFAs) serving children 1-5 years of age and not yet in traditional kindergarten. This meal pattern is for any SFA serving preschool students under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program, and Special Milk Program.

Age Groups: 1-2 years of age, 3-5 years of age

Key Differences Between the Preschool Meal Pattern and NSLP and SBP meal patterns:

- Flavored milk (i.e., chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla) is not allowable in any fat content.
- Grain-based desserts are not creditable. For a list of grain-based desserts in the preschool meal pattern, see the [Grain-Based Desserts resource](#).
- There are [sugar limits](#) on cereals and yogurts. If the sugar content in a serving of cereal or yogurt exceeds the designated threshold, the item cannot be served.
- 1.5 ounce equivalents (oz. eq.) meat/meat alternate is required at lunch daily for children 3-5 years of age.
- Offer versus Serve (OVS) is not an allowable meal service style.
- Minimum portion sizes must be met for the day only. There are no weekly minimums to meet.
- Vegetable subgroups do not exist in the preschool meal pattern. However, as a best practice, menu planners should provide a variety of vegetables.

Components

Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA)

- M/MA credit by oz. eq. A minimum of 0.25 oz. eq. is needed to credit.
- Daily minimums must be met:
 - Breakfast: M/MA is optional. M/MA may be substituted for the entire grains component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week. 0.5 oz. eq. of M/MA would need to be offered to children 1-5 years of age in order for the M/MA to count as a component. A grain does not have to be offered for the M/MA to credit.
 - Lunch: 1-2 years of age: **1.0 oz. eq.**; 3-5 years of age: **1.5 oz. eq.**
- Yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces.

Grains

- Grains credit by weight (oz. eq.). A minimum of 0.25 oz. eq. is needed to credit.
- Daily minimums must be met:
 - Breakfast and lunch: 1-5 years of age: **0.5 oz. eq.**
- At least one serving of grain per day must be whole grain-rich. If lunch is the only meal served, the grain offered at lunch must be whole grain-rich daily.
- All breakfast cereals, including ready-to-eat, instant, and regular hot cereal, must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugar per dry ounce.
- [Grain-based desserts](#) are not creditable towards the grains component.



Fruits

- Fruit credits by volume (cups). A minimum of 1/8 cup fruit per serving is needed to credit.
- Daily minimums must be met:
 - Breakfast: 1-2 years of age: **¼ cup.**; 3-5 years of age: **½ cup.** Fruit may be replaced by vegetable at breakfast *only if* the vegetable is served in the minimum portion size.
 - Lunch: 1-2 years of age: **1/8 cup.**; 3-5 years of age: **¼ cup.**
- Creditable forms of fruit include fresh, frozen, with or without added sugar, canned in water, light syrup or juice, dried, and 100% full-strength pasteurized juice.
 - Dried fruit credits as twice the volume served (i.e. ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of fruit).
 - Juice is limited to one meal or snack per day per student.



Vegetables

- Vegetables credit by volume (cups). A minimum of 1/8 cup vegetable per serving is needed to credit.
- Daily minimums must be met:
 - Breakfast: 1-2 years of age: **¼ cup.**; 3-5 years of age: **½ cup.** Vegetable may be replaced by fruit at breakfast *only if* fruit is served in the minimum portion size.
 - Lunch: 1-2 years of age: **1/8 cup.**; 3-5 years of age: **¼ cup.**
- Creditable forms of vegetable include fresh, frozen, canned, and full-strength pasteurized 100% juice.
 - Uncooked leafy vegetables credit as half of the volume served (i.e., 1 cup served= ½ cup creditable vegetable).
 - A mixed vegetable such as peas and carrots only count as one serving of vegetable regardless of serving size.
- There are no vegetable subgroups. However, a variety of vegetables should be offered.
- A second vegetable may be served in place of the entire fruit component at lunch. However, the second vegetable must be at least the same serving size as the fruit component it is replacing.

Milk

- Milk credits by volume (fluid ounces).
- Daily minimums must be met:
 - Breakfast and lunch: 1-2 years of age: **½ cup.**; 3-5 years of age: **¾ cup.**
- 1 year of age (12-23 months) must be served unflavored, whole milk only.
- 2-5 years of age must be served unflavored, low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk.
- There is a one-month transition period between the ages of 24 to 25 months when children may have 2% milk as they transition to low-fat or fat-free milk. This is the only time 2% milk is allowed and offering 2% milk during this transition is not required.
- Children may consume breastmilk after one year of age.
- Flavored milk (chocolate, strawberry, vanilla) cannot be served until kindergarten.
- Offering a milk variety is not required.

Offer versus Serve (OVS)

- Offer versus Serve (OVS) is not allowable.
- Preschool students must be served *all* components in at least the minimum serving size for their age or family style meal service may be used as an alternative. To learn more about family style meal service, please see the [Family Style Meal Service resource](#).

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