

Chapter 1

Giving Babies a Healthy Start With the CACFP

What's In This Chapter?

By the end of this chapter, child care providers will be able to:

- 1 Describe how a baby's usual eating habits fit within the CACFP infant meal pattern.
- 2 Recognize when a baby is hungry or full.
- 3 List at least three feeding skills babies are born with or develop.
- 4 Use tools to help talk to parents about their baby's eating habits.
- 5 Identify when a meal or snack is reimbursable.

Taste preferences and eating habits are formed early in a child's life, making your **child care site** an important part of a child's experiences with food. As a child care provider, you support the development of children's eating habits and can help them get a healthy start. During the first year of life, **infants'** mouths change from being able to only suck and swallow breastmilk or infant formula to being able to chew **solid foods**. Early in their first year, babies need your help during a feeding. At around 8 months of age, they begin to learn how to feed themselves. As babies continue to grow, they are able to eat different kinds of foods. Feeding babies the right foods at the right times helps them enjoy new tastes and **textures**, get the nutrition they need, and avoid choking.

What Are Solid Foods?

Solid foods, also known as **complementary foods**, are foods that are changed to the right texture (e.g., **pureed**, **mashed**, ground, finely chopped, etc.) and can be fed to a baby when he or she is developmentally ready.

A Baby's Eating Habits

Babies may get hungry at times outside of typical mealtimes. They may need to eat more or less often than older children. Babies may also eat smaller or larger amounts from day to day. For this reason, physicians and dietitians recommend that babies be fed **on demand**, which means feeding them when they show signs of being hungry. Babies should be offered food when they are hungry even if that is not during the regular meal schedule at your child care site. In rare cases, a parent may provide written instructions that the baby be fed on a strict schedule for a medical reason.

The **CACFP** infant meal pattern takes a baby's usual eating habits into account. As long as all of the required foods and amounts of foods are offered to the baby during the day, the "meals" are **reimbursable** under the CACFP. Some babies may eat less than what you offer them, and that's okay! Never force a baby to finish what is in the bottle, bowl, or plate.



How can I get reimbursed when a baby does not eat at a normal mealtime?

You can claim reimbursement for a meal in the CACFP even if the baby eats the foods at two different times in the day. For example, the baby may be offered breastmilk at 9 a.m. for the breakfast meal and then be offered **infant cereal** and pureed fruit at 10:30 a.m. based on when the baby shows signs of being hungry.

Talking With Parents About Their Baby's Eating Habits



Talk with parents often about their baby's eating habits. Some important things you can learn by talking with parents are:

- their decision to feed breastmilk or infant formula.
- when and how much their baby typically eats at home.
- when the baby has started eating solid foods.
- when new foods have been given to the baby.
- information about any **food allergies** and **intolerances**.
- foods the family does not eat because of religious or other reasons.



Tip:

The CACFP does not require that you provide a daily activity chart, but it is a great way to communicate with parents.

Parents also rely on you for information to plan for the best care for their baby, such as knowing how much breastmilk to bring for the day. One way to provide information to parents is through a daily activity chart that you can send home each day. It could include things like what the baby ate, bowel movements and number of wet diapers, number and length of naps, and other important notes. Child care licensing in your State may already require this. See **Appendix A: Sample Infant Daily Activity Chart** on **page 139** for an example.

For more tips on communicating with parents, see **Chapter 12: Partnering with Families** on **page 129**.

How Can I Tell When a Baby Is Hungry or Full?

Feeding "on demand" means feeding a baby when he or she shows signs of being hungry and stopping the feeding when the baby shows signs of being full. But how can you tell if a baby is hungry or full? Many people think that babies will cry when they are hungry. However, crying is a late sign of hunger. Crying can also mean other things besides hunger, such as wanting to be held or needing a new diaper. Babies may also cry because of gas or other sources of pain. Instead of waiting for a baby to cry, you can look for other signs that a baby is hungry, such as opening and closing his or her mouth or making sucking noises and motions. The next two tables in this guide on **pages 8 and 9** list and show pictures of other ways you can tell if a baby is hungry or full.

Responsive Feeding

Babies feel comforted and understood when you can quickly tell when they are hungry or full. If a baby shows signs of being hungry, prepare the breastmilk, infant formula, or solid foods for feeding. Feed the baby and let the baby stop eating when he or she is full. This gives the baby control over how much he or she eats during a feeding. It also helps the baby learn to eat when he or she is hungry and stop when he or she is full. Later in life, this will be an important skill for the child to have. Babies usually consume enough food to grow and develop when following this eating practice. If you or the parents have concerns that this is not the case, encourage the parents to discuss the baby's weight and eating habits with their **health care provider**.

How Can I Tell If a Baby Is Hungry or Full?

Table 1 How Can I Tell If a Baby Is Hungry?

Look for one or more of these hunger signs. Just remember, every baby is different! You might find a baby shows a combination of these or only one.



- Gets excited when he or she sees food



- Rooting



- Makes sucking noises and motions, or sucks on lips, hands, fingers, toes, toys, or clothing



- Moves head towards spoon or tries to bring food to his or her mouth



- Reaches or points to food



- Opens and closes mouth

Don't wait until the baby is crying before feeding him or her. It may be harder to get the baby to eat once he or she is upset. Look for some of the earlier signs of hunger above.

Table 2 How Can I Tell If a Baby Is Full?

Look for one or more of these signs that the baby is full:



- Sucks slowly or stops sucking



- Turns head away



- Falls asleep



- Pushes food away



- Seals lips together



- Looks around and does not pay attention during a feeding

You will normally see more than one of these signs together. When you see more than one sign, it is time to stop the feeding. This gives the baby control over how much he or she eats during a feeding.

Developmental Readiness

"A lot of parents may not know what developmental readiness is but this breaks it down. Just because they are 4 months old, it does not mean that they are ready to eat" - Director of a Child Care Center in New Mexico speaking about pages 10 and 12.



A baby's feeding skills are a good clue of what textures of food the baby may be ready to eat.

All babies develop at their own rate. The foods fed to a baby at different times during his or her first year are based upon the baby's development. This is related to how well the baby can control his or her muscles and digest certain foods. Although age and size are often related to **developmental readiness**, these should not be used as the only factors in deciding what and how to feed babies. A baby's **feeding skills** are a good clue of what food textures the baby may be ready to eat.

The CACFP infant meal pattern provides flexibility. This allows you, as the child care provider, the ability to feed babies based on their developmental readiness, ensuring that babies get what they need to grow and be healthy. We will talk more about this flexibility later in the chapter.

Feeding Breastmilk to Baby Emma

Baby Emma is 2 months old and was just enrolled in a family child care home. Baby Emma's mom works nearby and lets Marta, the child care provider, know she would like to breastfeed Emma during her lunch break. Marta is very supportive of the mom's decision to breastfeed and has a place for Baby Emma's mom to breastfeed. Baby Emma's mom is happy she can breastfeed her baby during the day. Marta is able to claim this breastfeeding session as part of a reimbursable lunch.

A Baby's Feeding Skills

As a baby grows and develops, he or she is able to eat different foods and textures. Below are feeding skills a baby will use that can tell you when he or she is ready for a new food.



Rooting - When a baby's mouth, lips, cheek, or chin are touched by an object, the baby turns his or her head towards the object and baby opens his or her mouth. This reflex lets a baby find and grasp a nipple.



Suck and swallow - When a baby's mouth is touched and he or she opens his or her lips and starts to suck. As liquid moves into the baby's mouth, his or her tongue moves it to the back of the mouth for swallowing.



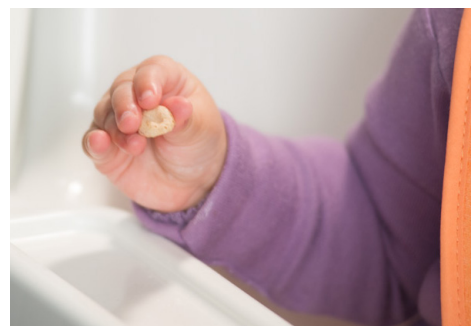
Tongue thrust - When the lips are touched, the baby's tongue moves out of the mouth. This reflex lets babies feed from the breast or bottle, but not from a spoon or a cup. When solid foods are started too early, the baby's tongue thrust reflex may be confused with the baby not liking the food that was given.



Gag reflex - When a spoon or solid food is placed in the mouth, the food is quickly pushed out of the mouth on the tongue. This reflex is an important reason for waiting until a baby is developmentally ready for solid foods.



Palmar grasp - When the baby uses his or her whole hand to pick up larger pieces of food or objects.



Pincer grasp - When a baby begins to use his or her thumb and index finger to pick up smaller pieces of food or objects.

For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?

Feeding your baby the right foods at the right time helps him or her get the nutrition needed for good health. Your baby will grow to enjoy many types and textures (smooth, lumpy, and so on) of food during his or her first year.

How Can You Tell When Your Baby Is Ready To Eat Solid Foods?

Your baby is ready to start solid foods if he or she:



- Opens his or her mouth when foods come his or her way or reaches for food.



- Sits in a high chair with good head control.



- Uses his or her tongue to move food from the spoon into his or her mouth. The tongue does not automatically push the food out of his or her mouth.



Why Does Your Baby Need To Try Solid Foods?

Starting solid foods when your child is developmentally ready is important because:

- Your baby is getting bigger and needs more calories and nutrients that can come from solid foods.
- It gives your baby a chance to try different foods so he or she will like them at an early age and will continue to eat them as he or she gets older.



Tip:

Many, but not all, babies show signs that they are developmentally ready for solid foods at around 6 months.



For Parents: Have You Already Started Giving Your Baby Solid Foods? Please Let Us Know!

Please complete this handout and give it to your child care provider.

Today's Date: _____

Baby's Birth Date: _____

Baby's Name (first and last): _____

Parent's Name (first and last): _____

What foods have you given to your baby? _____

Has your baby had an allergic reaction to any foods? _____

Did your baby's health care provider tell you that your baby has a food allergy or intolerance?

Yes No

• If yes, which foods should we not serve to your baby in child care? _____

If your baby has a reaction to a food, who should we call? Relationship: _____

Name: _____ Phone number: _____

If your baby has a reaction to a food at child care, is there medication your baby's health care provider said to give to him or her? _____

Are there foods your family does not eat due to religious reasons? Yes No

• If yes, which foods does your family not eat? _____

Is there anything else we should know about what or how your baby eats? _____

Parent's Signature: _____

A handout from *Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*

<https://teamnutrition.usda.gov> • FNS 786A • March 2019

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Infant Age Groups in the CACFP

There are two infant age groups under the CACFP infant meal pattern. They are **birth through 5 months** and **6 through 11 months**.

Did you know?

The CACFP infant meal pattern reflects how babies grow and develop and when they are typically ready for solid foods.



Older baby eating small pieces of bread at snack.



Food Components in the Infant Meal Pattern

Each meal and snack under the infant meal pattern is made up of **food components**, such as breastmilk or formula and vegetables and fruits. In some cases, there are several foods you may offer to meet the food component; these are indicated by the use of the word “or” after each component in **Table 3**, CACFP Infant Meal Pattern With Food Components on **page 15**.

A meal or snack is reimbursable as long as all required food components are offered to the baby during the course of the day while the baby is in your care. For example, if a baby was breastfed at home before arriving at child care, the baby may

not be hungry for the breakfast meal when he or she first arrives. Your child care site may offer the breakfast later in the morning when the infant is hungry and can still claim it for reimbursement. Babies do not need to eat the entire meal offered for the meal to be reimbursable. As long as the baby is offered all the required food components, the meal is still reimbursable.

See **Appendix B: Sample Infant Menu** on **page 140**.

Table 3**CACFP Infant Meal Pattern With Food Components**

Prepare all foods to the appropriate texture in order to match the baby's feeding skills and to prevent the baby from choking. For more information on textures, see **Chapter 6: Feeding Solid Foods** on **page 59**. Amounts below are minimum serving sizes that must be served in order for the meal to be reimbursable. For more information, see "Serving Sizes in the Infant Meal Pattern" on **page 17**.

Abbreviations
fl. oz. = fluid ounces
oz. = ounces
tbsp. = tablespoons

Breakfast	0 through 5 Months	6 through 11 Months
Breastmilk or infant formula	4–6 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²	6–8 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²
Grains or meat/meat alternates, or a combination		0–4 tbsp. infant cereal, ² meat, fish, poultry, whole eggs, cooked dry beans or peas; or 0–2 oz. cheese; or 0–4 oz. cottage cheese; or 0–4 oz. (½ cup) yogurt ³ ; or a combination of the above ⁴
Vegetables, fruit, or both		0–2 tbsp. vegetables, fruit, or both ^{4,5}
Lunch or Supper	0 through 5 Months	6 through 11 Months
Breastmilk or infant formula	4–6 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²	6–8 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²
Grains or meat/meat alternates, or a combination		0–4 tbsp. infant cereal, ² meat, fish, poultry, whole eggs, cooked dry beans or peas; or 0–2 oz. cheese; or 0–4 oz. cottage cheese; or 0–4 oz. (½ cup) yogurt ³ ; or a combination of the above ⁴
Vegetables, fruit, or both		0–2 tbsp. vegetables, fruit, or both ^{4,5}

Table 3 continued on pg 16

Table 3 continued from pg 15

Snack	0 through 5 Months	6 through 11 Months
Breastmilk or infant formula	4–6 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²	2–4 fl. oz. breastmilk ¹ or formula ²
Grains		0–½ bread slice ⁶ ; or 0–2 crackers ⁶ ; or 0–4 tbsp. infant cereal ^{2,6} ; or 0–4 tbsp ready-to-eat cereal ^{4,6,7}
Vegetables, fruit, or both		0–2 tbsp. vegetables, fruit, or both ^{4,5}

¹ Breastmilk or formula, or portions of both, must be served; however, it is recommended that breastmilk be served in place of formula from birth through 11 months. For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum amount of breastmilk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breastmilk may be offered, with additional breastmilk offered at a later time if the infant will consume more.

² Infant formula and dry infant cereal must be iron-fortified.

³ Yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces.

⁴ A serving of this component is required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.

⁵ Fruit and vegetable juices must not be served.

⁶ All grains served must be made with enriched or whole grain meal or flour. Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals and infant cereals that are fortified are also creditable.

⁷ Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce (no more than 21.2 grams sucrose and other sugars per 100 grams of dry cereal).

See **Appendix C: Infant Meal Pattern on page 143** to view the chart found in the Child and Adult Care Food Program: Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 Final Rule (7 CFR Parts 210, 215, 220, et al.). This can also be found online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks>.

Serving Sizes in the Infant Meal Pattern

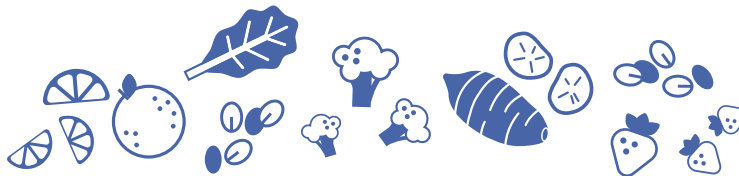
The infant meal pattern lists minimum serving sizes of breastmilk, infant formula, and solid foods as a range of numbers, rather than one specific number. For example, for vegetables and fruit, the serving size for infants 6 through 11 months is 0–2 tablespoons. This means that the infant must be offered 0 to 2 tablespoons of vegetables and/or fruit for the meal to be reimbursable. The baby does not have to eat the entire amount served for the meal to be reimbursed.

Minimum serving sizes are listed as ranges for infants because not all babies are ready to eat solid foods at the same time. A baby that has not yet started solid foods would receive a serving size of 0 tablespoons. A baby that has just started eating a certain vegetable may receive 1 tablespoon. Once a baby has been regularly eating a specific solid food, he or she would receive 2 tablespoons. In all of these instances, the meal would be reimbursable.



Child care provider feeding a baby solid food.

As a child care provider, start offering a baby solid foods after the parents have told you that the child is developmentally ready and is eating solid foods at home. You can use the "**For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?**" handout on **page 12** to help talk to parents about solid foods for their baby. Once an infant is regularly eating solid foods, you must offer all required food components.



Food Components Provided by the Parents

One food component provided by parents that meets the infant meal pattern requirements may also be part of a reimbursable meal. If a parent brings in a food component (e.g., pureed meat), you must offer iron-fortified infant formula and all other required food components. If a baby is only drinking breastmilk or infant formula and the parent provides the breastmilk or infant formula, the meal is reimbursable. Likewise, the meal is reimbursable if a mother breastfeeds her baby at your child care site.

In This Chapter

In this chapter, you have learned about how a baby's eating habits fit within the CACFP infant meal pattern, hunger and fullness signs, feeding skills, and food components within the CACFP infant meal pattern. You will use this information in the next chapter when we learn more about offering breastmilk to a baby at your child care site.



The two infant age groups under the CACFP infant meal pattern are:
(1) birth through 5 months, and
(2) 6 through 11 months.



By telling parents the amount of breastmilk consumed by their baby each day, you can help families know the amount of breastmilk needed at child care.



Serve solid foods once the parents tell you the baby is developmentally ready and eating solid foods at home. This is usually around 6 months of age.



The range of serving sizes (i.e., 0–2 tablespoons) for solid foods in the infant meal pattern shows that all babies are not developmentally ready to eat solid foods at the same time. The range of serving sizes, starting at “0”, supports the gradual introduction of solid foods. Once a baby has been introduced to a food, you would offer the baby the full amount.



The CACFP infant meal pattern includes food components and amounts that must be offered to the baby for a meal or snack to be reimbursable under the CACFP. The baby does not have to eat all the food offered in order for the meal or snack to be reimbursed.



Feed babies when they show signs of hunger instead of on a set schedule. You can still be reimbursed for the meal as long as all of the food components are offered during the day.



Talking often with parents of babies can help you know when the baby is developmentally ready for solid foods. Use the “**For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?**” handout on **page 12** to help you talk to parents about solid foods.

Check Your Knowledge

1. Fill in the blank: What are the two age groups under the CACFP infant meal pattern? _____ and _____.
2. A father brings in organic pureed carrots for his 6-month-old baby to have at lunch. As the child care provider, what foods do you need to offer to the baby to claim reimbursement for lunch?
3. A mother breastfeeds her baby before she brings him to child care. He is asleep when he arrives and stays asleep until 11 a.m. You did not have a chance to offer him breakfast since he was asleep. What do you do in order to claim reimbursement of the breakfast meal?

ANSWER: 1. Birth through 5 months and 6 months through 11 months. Since the organic pureed carrots count as the one parent-provided food component, you must offer all other food components. This could include iron-fortified infant cereal or a meat or meat alternate, such as pureed chicken or mashed beans, and iron-fortified infant formula. Be sure to offer the minimum serving size of each item in order to be reimbursed.

3. If the baby shows signs of being hungry when he wakes up at 11 a.m., offer him or her the breakfast you would have offered earlier that morning. Babies do not eat on a set schedule, so feeding them when they are hungry is okay. As long as you offer the breastmilk or infant formula and foods once the baby shows signs of being hungry, you can claim reimbursement for the breakfast meal.