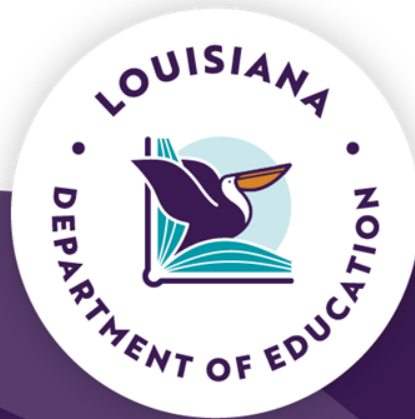


Child Nutrition Concepts and Healthy Eating in Head Start

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July 22, 2026

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Head Start's Role in Nutrition

- Increase availability of and access to healthy foods
- Help families access affordable, healthy food options at home
- Support families with pregnancy, post-partum, and breastfeeding
- Provide families with education on nutrition
- Promote the importance of regular physical activity
- Connect families with available nutrition-related services



Why Nutrition Matters

- Brain Development
- Healthy bones and teeth
- Strengthen immunity
- Decrease infections/illnesses
- Improve learning and social skills
- Obesity Prevention



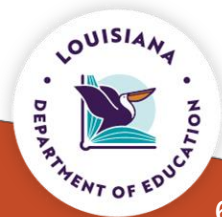
Head Start Research Outcomes

- More likely to receive dental checkups;
- Have healthy eating patterns than non-participants;
- Have lower Body Mass Index (BMI) scores and are less likely to be overweight compared to children in other non-parental care (Lee et al., 2013); and
- Obese, overweight, or underweight children who participate in Head Start have a significantly healthier BMI by kindergarten (Lumeng, et al., 2015).
- Head Start graduates have better health status as adults than non-graduates; they are 7% less likely to be in poor health as adults than their siblings who did not attend Head Start (Johnson, 2010; Deming, 2009).

Nutrition Requirements for Head Start

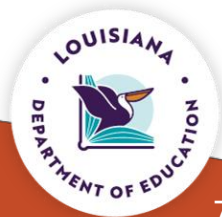
The Performance Standards at **45 CFR §1302.44** detail specific child nutrition requirements, which include:

- Programs that operate <6 hours per day must provide ½ to ⅓ of the daily [nutrition requirements](#)
- Programs that operate >6 hours per day must provide ½ to ⅔ of the daily nutrition requirements
- Serve 3 to 5 year-olds meals and snacks that meet USDA requirements and are **high in nutrients**, and **low in saturated fat, sugar, and salt**.
- Ensure that all children receive a **nourishing** breakfast



Nutrition Requirements Continued

- Provide appropriate healthy snacks and meals during group socialization activities in the home-based option
- Promote breastfeeding for mothers who wish to breastfeed during program hours.
 - This may include offering facilities to properly store and handle breast milk and making accommodations when needed.
- Connect families to community lactation consultants or counselors when they choose breastfeeding but need support to be successful.



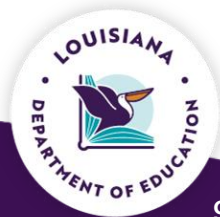
Child and Adult Care Food Program & Head Start

- All Head Start grant recipients and their delegate agencies are required to participate in USDA Child Nutrition Programs
- LA Licensing **28, § CLXI-1919** requires the CACFP Meal Pattern
- CACFP meal patterns ensure children receive a variety of nutrient dense foods including:
 - Whole grains
 - Fresh fruits & vegetables
- CACFP encourages reducing intake of:
 - Ultra-processed foods
 - Added sugars
 - Saturated fats



CACFP and Head Start

- The amounts and types of food varies based on the meal or snack and age group being served.
- USDA provides multiple resources to assist programs in determining how food credits towards the meal patterns
- **45 CFR §1302.44(b)** allows Head Starts grand funds to cover any allowable food costs that are not covered by the CACFP.
 - Foods purchased must conform with the nutritional requirements
- Head Start grant funds may be used to pay for food that is provided to families for consumption at home, if they have a specific programmatic purpose.



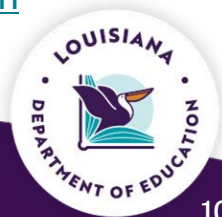
CACFP Program Updates

Effective June 8, 2026, the USDA allows CACFP operators to offer whole and reduced-fat (2%) milk to participants ages two and older. This policy adds flexibility rather than a mandate, giving providers the option to serve whole, reduced-fat, low-fat (1%), or fat-free (skim) milk to these age groups.

The specific USDA milk guidelines by age group are:

- Age 1: Only unflavored whole milk is allowed.
- Ages 2–5: Unflavored whole milk, reduced-fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free (skim) milk are all allowed. Flavored milk is still prohibited for this age group.
- Ages 6 and older & adult participants: Both unflavored and flavored versions of whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free milk are allowed.

For more details on the exact policy implementation, you can review the full [USDA Memo on Expanding Fluid Milk Options](#) or check the resources available on the [National CACFP Association](#).



CACFP Meal Patterns

Breakfast

Milk:

4 oz (1-2 yrs)

6 oz (3-5 yrs)

1 years old must receive whole milk

2 yrs + skim, 1%, 2%, or whole milk

Fruit and/or Vegetables:

¼ cups (1-2 yrs)

½ cups (3-5 yrs)

Aim to offer a variety of colorful options throughout the week.

Grain:

½ oz equiv. (1-5 yrs)

Oatmeal, whole-grain cereal, toast

A meat may be served in place of the grains component up to 3x/week

Snack

Any 2 of the 5 Components:

1. Milk 4 oz (1-5 yrs)
2. Vegetables ½ cups (1-5 yrs)
3. Fruits ½ cups (1-5 yrs)
4. Meats/Meat Alternates ½ oz (1-5 yrs)
5. Grains ½ oz equiv. (1-5 yrs)

CACFP Lunch/Supper Meal Pattern

Meat / Meat Alternate: 1 oz (1-2 yrs) 1.5 oz (3-5 yrs) Meat, cheese, eggs, beans, tofu, yogurt	Milk: 4 oz (1-2 yrs) 6 oz (3-5 yrs) 1 years old must receive whole milk 2 yrs + skim, 1%, 2%, or whole milk	Vegetables: 1/8 cups (1-2 yrs) 1/4 cups (3-5 yrs) Aim to offer a variety of colorful options throughout the week.	Grain: 1/2 oz equiv. (1-5 yrs) Whole-grain rich or enriched bread, pasta, rice, etc.
	Fruit: 1/8 cups (1-2 yrs) 1/4 cups (3-5 yrs) Aim to offer a variety of colorful options throughout the week. May substitute a 100% juice for a fruit or vegetable component.		

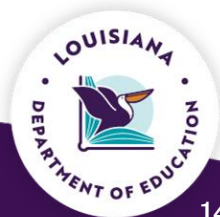
CACFP Best Practices:

Eat the Rainbow!

				
WHITE	YELLOW	RED	PURPLE	GREEN
 Immune system  Healthy colon  Prevents ulcers  Lowers cholesterol  Healthy heart	 Healthy heart  Lowers cholesterol  Healthy joints/tissues  Supports eyesight  Prevents Cancer	 Healthy heart  Decr. blood pressure  Skin protection  Helps cell renewal  Prevents Cancer	 Healthy heart  Healthy blood vessels  Helps memory  Anti-aging  Healthy urinary system	 Improves digestion  Supports eyesight  Healthy bones  Immune system  Prevents Cancer

CACFP Best Practices: Grains

- 94-95% of American children fail to meet recommended fiber intake
 - Recommendations:
 - 19 grams per day for ages 1-3
 - 25 grams per day for ages 4-5
- Limit ultra-processed grains as much as possible
- Choose whole grain at least half the time
- Choose options lower in added sugars



CACFP Best Practices: Meat/Meat Alternates

- Choose lean meats
- Try plant-based options such as:
 - Lentils, beans, tofu
- Limit ultra-processed meats
- Aim to serve fish 1-2 times a week
- Limit pre-fried options



CACFP Best Practices: Example Menu

Breakfast

- ★ Milk
- ★ Mixed Berries
- ★ Oatmeal

Lunch

- ★ Milk
- ★ Lean Ground Beef
Burger
- ★ Whole Grain Bun
- ★ Oven Roasted Broccoli
- ★ Mandarin Orange Slices

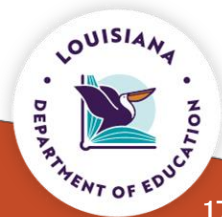
Snack

- ★ Apple Slices
- ★ Cheese Stick

Creating a Positive Feeding Environment

Performance Standards for Head Starts focuses on the teaching and learning environment. The Performance Standards ensure that mealtimes are structured and used as learning opportunities.

- **Language skills** are strengthened through social conversations and **fine motor abilities** are tested in handling utensils or serving aids.
- **Social skills** involved in the back and forth of mealtime conversation also help children navigate friendships, turn-taking, and **self-regulation**.

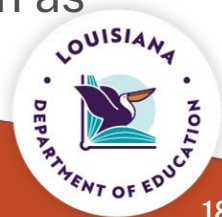


Creating a Positive Feeding Environment

Practice Division of Responsibility: Adults decide *what*, *when*, and *where* food is served, children decide *whether* to eat and *how much* to eat. Respect their natural hunger and fullness cues.

Remove Pressure and Labels: Never force, coerce, or bribe a child to take a bite. Use food-neutral language. Never label a food as “bad” or “good”.

Provide Structure and Calming Routines: Offer meals and snacks on a consistent schedule and limit distractions such as music or television as much as possible.



Supporting Children's Satiety Cues

We often say:

"Eat more of that."

"Can you eat one more bite?"

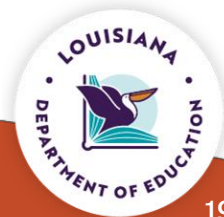
"Eat your vegetable before you can have dessert."

Instead try:

"Are you full?"

"Have you had enough to eat?"

"What does your tummy feel like? Does it have enough food? Would you like some more?"



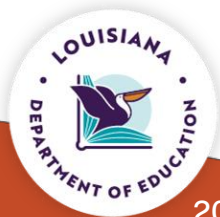
Division of Responsibility in Feeding:

Promote the idea that with support and an appropriate eating environment, children can naturally decide what they eat and self-regulate around food

Is a process that staff and families can learn and carry out gradually with children from the youngest age

Reinforce adults to listen and educate children about feelings of hunger and fullness

For more information check out <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/division-of-responsibility/>



Family Style Dining

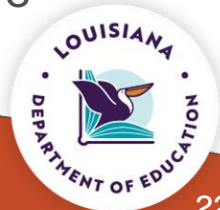
What is it? When children and teachers sit together for a meal or snack. Foods are placed on the table in serving dishes and children serve themselves with assistance from the supervising adult. Offers a chance for staff to **role model** healthy food choices and importance of nutrition.

Family style dining may benefit children by:

- Encouraging healthy food choices
- Supporting children to learn in developmentally appropriate ways about serving sizes, food groups, and value of trying new foods
- Opportunity for children to practice using appropriately sized utensils to serve themselves which improves fine motor skills, boosts self-confidence, and expands social skills.

Family Style Dining: Requirements

- Sufficient amount of food must be placed on each table to provide the full required portions of each component for all children and the supervising adult
- Every child must be offered and encouraged to take the full portion of each meal component required for their age group
- If a child refuses a component or full portion size, the supervising adult is responsible for actively encouraging the child to take at least a trial portion, or offering a second helping of the food component during the course of the meal
- Staff meals and total amounts served must be tracked in Kidkare
- Food for staff meals may be purchased with CACFP funds



Fun Ways to Encourage Healthy Eating

Menus

Use the menu to guide discussion about foods and beverages during mealtime.

Continue to engage children in discussions about food during scheduled activities and routines throughout the day.

Make Mealtime a Learning Time

Involve children in conversations about the specific characteristics of the food they are eating: the color, where it grows, how it is prepared, and if it is a new food

Fun Ways to Encourage Healthy Eating

Get them participating!

Age 2:

- Wipe table tops
- Move premeasured dry ingredients from one bowl to another, or pour them into a bowl
- Wash and tear lettuce and salad greens
- Carry unbreakable items to the table

Age 3:

- Pour liquids into a bowl
- Mix ingredients such as batter
- Spread soft spreads such as hummus or peanut butter on firm bread/crackers
- Knead dough
- Rinse fruits/vegetables

Ages 4-5:

- Form round shapes of dough or other soft foods with hands
- Measure dry and liquid ingredients
- Peel loose-skinned oranges
- Mash soft or cooked fruits/vegetables with a fork

Nutrition Education for Children

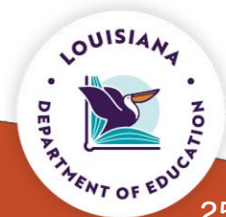
Trying new foods

Having taste test activities outside of mealtime is a great way to let children explore new foods.

Let them touch, feel smell, and taste samples of food.

Have them assist in preparation of the food if possible.

USDA Resource: [Grow It, Try It, Like It! Nutrition Education Kit](#)



Nutrition Education for Families

Teach the 5-4-3-2-1 Rule

5 servings of fruits and vegetables

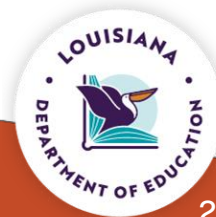
4 glasses of water

3 servings of dairy

2 hours or less of screen time

1 hour or more of exercise

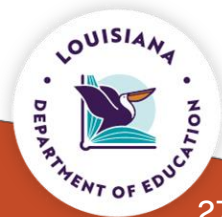
Programs are strongly encouraged to provide specific information to families about the importance of eating whole foods and minimizing ultra-processed foods and avoiding added sugars such as those in soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages.



Collaborating with Families

Parent and family engagement is a cornerstone of comprehensive Head Start services. Programs must partner with families to support their wellbeing and their children's learning and development.

- Promote children's and families health by providing **nutrition education support services** to individuals
- Collaborate with parents to **discuss their child's nutritional status** including the importance of healthing eating, the negative consequences of sugar-sweetened beverages, and the importance of physical activity
- Help parents understand **how to select and prepare nutritious foods** that meet the family's nutrition and food budget needs



Additional Resources

[Nourishing Futures: Promoting Healthy Eating and Nutrition for Head Start Children and Families Fact Sheet](#)

[Nutrition Building Blocks](#) is a free course offered through the Head Start learning management system, the Individualized Professional Development (iPD) Portfolio. Complete the course to earning continuing education units while learning how to integrate healthy nutrition messages into music and movement activities for young children and teachers.

[Caring for Children with Food Allergies](#)

[Watch the CACFP Meal Patterns Webinar](#) *note this was done prior to the new milk update

[Tips on Solving Picky Eating](#)

[15 Playful Eating Preschool Activities](#)

[Watch the Webinar Cooking with Kids Builds a Strong Mind and Body](#)

[Harvest for Healthy Kids A Farm to Preschool Curriculum](#)

[Louisiana Fit Kids - Louisiana CACFP Training Resources](#)

Thank you!

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