

CACFP Child and Adult Meal Pattern requirements reflection

Lesson 1

The module begins with an overview of different types of milk products, yogurt, other dairy products, and non-dairy milk substitutes. While taking the quiz, I learned the differences in when and what types of milk or milk substitutes are permitted for different age groups. However, they repeatedly emphasize that parents should understand that breastfeeding and serving breast milk are paramount unless the parent cannot provide this, in which case they may use an alternative. They then address the age group of 1 to 23 months, noting that whole milk is essential for healthy development and growth, and specifying new requirements of 4 oz. or 0.5 cup of unflavored whole milk. I had previously learned different quantities and methods, but I am glad I completed this module, as it provided insight into the updated recommendations. I would not have considered using whole milk for this age group, and as children progress, they can transition to low-fat or skim milk, though the module notes this transition could be challenging for some children. I understand the importance of emphasizing unflavored milk because, growing up, and from what I observe in public, most children rarely drink plain milk, often preferring flavored varieties. I believe we need to highlight the importance of reviewing nutrition labels when choosing flavored milk. They specify that flavorings can be introduced for children older than six years of age and emphasize “only” in this section to prevent misunderstandings. For adults, they outline similar requirements, specifying 6 ounces of yogurt per day. This module reminds me of the lifecycle, illustrating how requirements are similar yet differ in significant ways.

Lesson 2

Each lesson has its own objectives; this one focuses on meats and meat alternatives and how to implement them. The three main updates are that, during breakfast, meat can replace an entire grain component no more than three times per week, that tofu and yogurt are effective meat replacements, and that yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces. I understand that across all these modules, they consistently promote the sugar-to-yogurt ratio, and since this is emphasized so strongly, it must be a significant issue. The main points, beyond the inclusion of meat or meat alternatives during meals, are that when these are served outside of the three times per week or as non-meal items, they are not reimbursable. While tofu is an excellent meat replacement, it is not suitable for infant meals and comes with certain caveats, such as how it is prepared or sourced. I hadn't considered other uses for tofu, but if it is used to replace nutrients or enhance texture, it is not reimbursable, and it must contain at least 5 grams of protein. Once again, they highlight the importance of yogurt, and, as I noted in the previous section, it's clear that yogurt is widely consumed and poses a risk if it does not meet the appropriate serving size or sugar content. To explore this further, frozen, drinkable, and other forms of yogurt are not creditable in the CACFP. While delving into this topic, I completely forgot about other protein sources, like nuts and seeds. Although they may pose choking hazards, they are excellent sources of protein and fiber, though their nutritional content varies by product.

Lesson 3

This lesson returns to fruits and vegetables, noting that juice, while it has its place, is limited to once per day. I believe these food groups are consumed in low amounts across all age groups and require a significant public health effort to increase their intake. I think the second challenge is the lack of diversity in these foods; even when individuals consume these foods, they often limit themselves to a small variety. Another major public health concern is the consumption of liquid

calories, particularly juice. The module notes that, while juice can provide nutrients, it should be limited due to its lack of fiber and frequently high sugar content, and they reiterate that juice is not permitted for infants. I must highlight an important point raised by many parents both to me and in general: what about 100% juice blends or purees? Are they equivalent to regular juice, and how do they compare? It's important to note that the more fruits and vegetables in a blend, the more beneficial it is. However, I believe using a blender or food processor to preserve fiber makes it a valuable source, but caution is needed with commercially purchased products due to their liquid calorie content. The primary takeaway from this module was the application of fruits and vegetables to lunch and snack menus, striving to include at least two different types.

Lesson 4

While grains were not a major topic in the previous module, this one focuses entirely on them. They emphasize the importance of grains because of their nutrients, fiber, and fortified nutrients. In the past, I consumed many fruits and vegetables but rarely ate grains due to adverse reactions I experienced, surprisingly, only in the United States. They note that, for children and adults, it's important to consume at least one serving of grains per day and that breakfast cereals should contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce. I believe this point is critical because my generation was raised on highly sugary commercial cereals with vibrant colors and marketing incentives. As I previously mentioned, the trickle-down education aspect of nutrition begins with parents. While I do not advocate restricting foods of any kind, I promote being mindful of what's in the food and how much is consumed. An important insight I learned is the requirement for grain sources to be 100% whole grains or at least 50% whole grains, with the remainder being enriched grains. However, they clarify that this applies only to children and adults, not infants. In Week 2, we had a discussion post on fortified, enriched, and biofortified foods, and I'm glad we

covered this, because it prepared me for this lesson, which delves deeply into these concepts. I believe the public often misinterprets these terms as bioengineered or harmful, but with proper education, they could leverage these foods to obtain vitamins and nutrients if they cannot access whole foods. I also learned that whole grains and wheat are newly emphasized priorities, but these standards do not apply to crackers, tortillas, bagels, and biscuits because they lack an FDA standard of identity. The final aspect that resonated with me was the “rule of three”, which is essential for consumers to understand what they are purchasing and to equip themselves with tools to accurately assess whole grains in their diets.

Lesson 5

The final lesson covers preparing and serving meals, highlighting four key principles: no deep-fried foods, support for family-style dining, adult care facilities and at-risk afterschool programs can use offer-versus-serve, and, most importantly, food should never be used as a reward mechanism. I recognize that the last principle may seem straightforward, but in early or later years, it could have a significant impact. The current trend of using beef tallow as a “healthy” alternative overlooks that, when deep-frying, you must still account for those calories, which may not be accurately calculated, as well as its effect on eating portions and disease risk. While they highlight the importance of family-style meals, I had not considered the social, emotional, and motor skill benefits associated with them. Having learned from the pandemic that isolation has a detrimental effect on all age groups, I believe having one or more meals with family or friends could positively impact everyone involved. While these benefits are significant, allowing children or older adults to control portion sizes and eating habits while serving is equally important. Family-style dining was a novel concept to me when I left the United States, but I have since adopted this style in my own household, and I believe it plays a significant role for

children and older adults, potentially having the greatest impact on their social and emotional well-being.