

Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This document summarizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) requirements for meal modifications for children in child care facilities that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). These requirements apply to all CACFP child care centers, family day care homes, emergency shelters, and at-risk afterschool care centers. For detailed guidance, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) and visit the CSDE’s [Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) webpage.



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The requirements for meal modifications for children in the CACFP are defined by the USDA's nondiscrimination regulations ([7 CFR 15b](#)) and CACFP regulations ([7 CFR 226.20\(g\)](#)). These regulations outline the required modifications for children whose disability restricts their diet (disability reasons) and the optional modifications for children who do not have a disability but have other special dietary needs (non-disability reasons). The different requirements for disability and non-disability meal modifications are summarized below.

Required Meal Modifications for Disability Reasons

The USDA requires that CACFP facilities must make reasonable meal modifications on a case-by-case basis for children whose disability restricts their diet, based on written documentation from a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. Meal modifications must be related to the disability or limitations caused by the disability.

Effective October 1, 2025, the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), requires that CACFP facilities must accept medical statements signed by registered dietitians to request meal modifications for children whose disability restrict their diet. CACFP facilities may choose to accept medical statements from registered dietitians prior to this deadline. For more information, refer to [7 CFR 226.20\(g\)\(1\)\(i\)](#) and [USDA Memo SP 07-2025 and CACFP 07-2025: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians for Schools and Child and Adult Care Institutions and Facilities](#).

- **reasonable modification** is a change or alteration in policies, practices, and/or procedures to accommodate a disability that ensures children with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from a program. The general guideline in making a reasonable modification is that children with disabilities must be able to participate in and receive benefits from programs that are available to children without disabilities.
- **Case-by-case basis** means that the meal modifications are specific to the individual medical condition and dietary needs of each child, based on the specific information provided by the state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian in the child's medical statement or, if applicable, the child's Section 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP).

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- A **state licensed healthcare professional** is an individual who is authorized to write medical prescriptions under state law. The Connecticut State Department of Public Health (DPH) defines these individuals as physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA) and certified physician assistants (PAC), doctors of osteopathy (DO), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN).
- A **registered dietitian** (RD) or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) is an individual with a minimum of a graduate degree from an accredited dietetics program and who completed a supervised practice requirement, passed a national exam, and completes continuing professional educational requirements to maintain registration. For more information, visit the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' (AND) [Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Fact Sheet](#) website.

For detailed guidance on the meal modification requirements for disability reasons, refer to section 2 of the CSDE's [Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs](#).

Optional Meal Modifications for Non-disability Reasons

CACFP facilities may choose to make optional meal modifications within or outside the CACFP meal patterns on a case-by-case basis for children whose dietary needs do not constitute a disability. Optional modifications for non-disability reasons include requests related to religious or moral convictions, general health concerns, and personal food preferences. An example is a family's preference for gluten-free foods, organic foods, or almond milk because they believe these foods are healthier.

The requirements for optional meal modifications for non-disability reasons depend on whether they are within or outside the CACFP meal patterns.

- **Modifications within the CACFP meal patterns:** Meal modifications are within the CACFP patterns if they are only modified for texture (such as chopped, ground, or pureed foods) or they include substitutions within the same meal component, such as a banana for strawberries (fruits component), lactose-free milk for regular milk (milk component), and chicken for pork (meats/meat alternates component). These modifications do not require a medical statement. However, the CSDE recommends obtaining a medical statement to ensure clear communication between parents/guardians and the CACFP facility regarding the appropriate meal modifications for the child. For information on the CACFP meal patterns for children, visit the "[CACFP Meal Patterns for Children](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.
- **Modifications outside the CACFP meal patterns:** Meal modifications are outside the CACFP meal patterns if they include noncreditable foods. Noncreditable foods are foods and beverages that do not meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements for reimbursable

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meals and snacks. Examples include entrees that do not meet the meats/meat alternates component and substituting rice milk for cow's milk. Meal modifications for non-disability reasons that are outside the CACFP meal patterns require a medical statement signed by a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. For information on noncreditable foods, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Noncreditable Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#).

For detailed guidance on optional meal modifications for non-disability reasons, refer to section 3 of the CSDE's [Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs](#).

Optional Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons

Fluid milk substitutes are plant-based beverages designed to replace cow's milk, such as soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, and oat milk. CACFP facilities may choose to offer one or more allowable fluid milk substitutes for children who do not consume regular cow's milk for non-disability reasons. These substitutions require a written request that identifies the reason for the milk substitute. This written request must be from the parent/guardian, a state licensed healthcare professional, or a registered dietitian.

All fluid milk substitutes for non-disability reasons must meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes. In addition, fluid milk substitutes offered in child care centers in public schools must also meet the state beverage requirements for nondairy milk substitutes under [Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes \(C.G.S.\)](#); they cannot exceed 4 grams of sugar per ounce, 35 percent of calories from fat, and 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.

For detailed guidance on the requirements for fluid milk substitutes, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) and [Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#).

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Required Meal Modification Documentation for Disability Reasons

Meal modifications for disability reasons that are outside the CACFP meal patterns require a medical statement signed by a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. The medical statement must include the three elements below.

1. Information about the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the CACFP facility to understand how it restricts the child's diet.
2. An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability.
3. If appropriate, the food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives.

In some cases, more information may be required. For example, if the child requires caloric modifications or the substitution of a liquid nutritive formula to accommodate a disability, the state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian should include this information in the medical statement.

Medical information in Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan

CACFP facilities are not required to obtain a separate medical statement if the child has an IEP or 504 plan that includes the three required elements, or the CACFP facility obtains the required information during the development or review of the child's IEP or 504 plan.

Medical information in doctor's note or electronic medical statements

Acceptable documentation for meal modifications includes any written or electronic statement that includes the three required elements and is signed by a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. Examples include a doctor's note and medical statements with electronic signatures. CACFP facilities are not required to obtain a separate medical statement when an alternate written or electronic statement provides the required information.

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Determining if a Meal Modification is Required

CACFP facilities can determine if a child requires a meal modification by reviewing question 1 in section B of the CSDE's medical statement form, *Medical Statement for Meal Modifications for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. This question asks the state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian to indicate if the child has a physical or mental impairment that restricts their diet.

- If the answer is "yes," the CACFP facility must make a reasonable meal modification.
- If the answer is "no," the CACFP facility may choose to make a reasonable meal modification.

The CSDE's medical statement form and instructions for child care programs are available in English and Spanish in the "[Medical Statements](#)" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Resources

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/milk_substitutes_cacfp.pdf

CACFP regulations 7 CFR 226.20(g)(1): Modifications for disability reasons (USDA):

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20\(g\)\(1\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20(g)(1))

CACFP regulations 7 CFR 226.20(g)(2): Variations for non-disability reasons (USDA):

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20\(g\)\(2\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20(g)(2))

CACFP regulations 7 CFR 226.20(g)(3): Fluid milk substitutes for non-disability reasons (USDA):

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20\(g\)\(3\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-226#p-226.20(g)(3))

Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/guide_special_diets_cacfp.pdf

Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/identify_allowable_nondairy_milk_substitutes_cacfp.pdf

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Medical Statements (CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/medical-statements>

Sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Meal Modifications in Child Care Facilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/sample_sop_meal_modifications_cacfp.docx

Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/medical-statements>

Summary Charts of the Requirements for Meal Modifications for Children in the CACFP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/summary_chart_meal_modifications_cacfp.pdf

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (USDA):

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for>

USDA Memo CACFP 14-2017 and SFSP 10-2017: Policy Memorandum on Modifications to Accommodate Disabilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/modifications-accommodate-disabilities-cacfp-and-sfsp>

USDA Memo SP 07-2025 and CACFP 07-2025: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians for Schools and Child and Adult Care Institutions and Facilities:

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cn/requirement-accept-medical-statements-registered-dietitians>

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) webpage or contact the [CACFP staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/specdiet/overview_meal_modifications_cacfp.pdf.

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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