

Offering Water in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program

In the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), centers and homes are required to offer water to children throughout the day. As a best practice, sites are encouraged to make water available to adult participants as well. Water is not a meal component in the CACFP. There is no minimum serving amount for water. However, water may be served:

- Together with meals and snacks
- In between meals and snack
- As requested by the adult or child.



Water and Health

Drinking enough water is important for good health. Drinking water can prevent dehydration, a condition that can cause the body to overheat. It can also help prevent constipation. If fluoridated, drinking water can help prevent dental caries (cavities).

There is no recommendation from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* on the amount of plain water children and adults need each day. Children and adults can meet their needs for water through foods and drinks. People may need to drink more water during hot or cold weather and when exercising.



A Note About Infants

Infants usually do not need to drink plain water until they are at least 6 months old. Once an infant has started eating solid foods, small amounts of plain, fluoridated water may be offered to the infant in a cup. Consult with the parents or guardians of older infants regarding whether small amounts of water should be offered.



Meal Planning and Water

In the CACFP, milk is an important meal component. Milk provides important nutrition for both children and adults.

- ✓ Under the CACFP meal pattern for children, you may not serve water instead of milk at meals. However, water may be served at the table along with the milk.
- ✓ Under the CACFP meal patterns for children and adults, only two meal components are required at snack. If milk is not offered as one of the two required components, consider offering water with the snack.
- ✓ Under the CACFP meal pattern for adults, you may serve yogurt in place of milk once per day. In addition, a serving of milk is optional at supper. It is not required that you offer water on these occasions, but you are encouraged to do so.

Making Water Available

You can make water available throughout the day by:

- Placing closed pitchers of water and cups where program participants can reach them. Use pitchers that are small enough for children to lift and pour.
- Putting cups beside a sink, water fountain, or other source of drinking water. Or, pour and offer cups of water to children throughout the day.
- If drinking fountains are too tall for children, use a sturdy stool to allow children to reach them.
- Making class trips to the water fountain after active play.

! *Note: When self-serve water stations are not recommended, such as during a public health emergency or pandemic, try offering cups of water to children regularly throughout the day. Always follow local health department safety guidelines.*



Getting Children Involved

When children help serve water, they can learn about the importance of drinking it. Ask children to wash their hands and then let them:

- Carry cups to tables.
- Pour water into cups (with the help of an adult, for younger children).
- Decorate their own water cups or water bottles.



Note: Some of these activities may not be recommended during a public health emergency or pandemic. Always follow local health department safety guidelines.

Also, consider sharing the Nibbles for Health Newsletter on “Water: It’s a Great Choice” with parents of young children (fns.usda.gov/tn/nibbles). It contains an activity families can do together.

See Team Nutrition’s “Summer Foods, Summer Moves” materials for more resources on water (fns.usda.gov/tn/summer-food-summer-moves).



Tip Drink water and kids will too.



Offer Water Safely

Keep children healthy and safe by:

- Regularly sanitizing water fountains and keeping drinking areas clean.
- Teaching children not to place their mouths on water fountain spouts. Have kids wash their hands after touching the water fountain.
- Cleaning and sanitizing water pitchers, dispensers, and reusable drinking cups after use.
- Keeping clean towels nearby when serving or pouring water.
- Placing rubber mats under spaces where water is offered.



Note: If safe drinking water is not available at your center or child care home, bottled water may be purchased with CACFP funds. Check with your State agency or sponsoring organization for more information.



Try It Out!

When will you offer water? Fill in the blanks below.

I will offer water to program participants (children or adults):

1 (Example) When it is hot outside

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____



Answers:

Answers will vary, but responses may include:

2. After milk at breakfast, lunch, or supper

3. After outdoor playtime

4. With snacks when milk is not served

5. Throughout the day

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