



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

### Beverages that Count



The beverage aisle at the grocery store is filled with bright colors and enticing products. Unfortunately, many beverages, such as sports drinks and soda, are high in added sugars, which add unnecessary calories to the diet. Serving more nutritious beverages can provide essential nutrients to a child's diet, as well as promote good eating habits. Therefore, knowing how to identify nutritious beverages, such as milk, juice, and water, that fit into the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern, can help to promote good eating habits for the children in your child care.

First, milk is a nutritious beverage because it contributes protein, calcium, vitamins A and D and several B vitamins to the diet. Low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk is recommended for children over the age of two because it is high in protein and calcium, and lower in saturated fat than reduced-fat (2%) or whole milk. Saturated fat should be limited because it has been associated with heart disease. However, it is recommended that children one to two years old drink whole milk because they need the additional fat for the rapid brain development that occurs at this age.

One-hundred percent fruit or vegetable juice can be a good beverage choice. However, it is important to limit it to the appropriate serving size for young children and only use it occasionally. Juice contains vitamins and minerals, but it does not contain the health-promoting fiber that whole fruits and vegetables provide. Therefore, serve a variety of whole fruits and vegetable more frequently than juice.

Another popular way for children to get the essential nutrients from fruits and vegetables is by serving smoothies; a drinkable blend of fruit and vegetables is to serve smoothies; a drinkable blend of fruit, vegetables, milk and/or yogurt. The ingredients used to make smoothies can be counted toward the CACFP meal pattern. Not to mention, there are many tasty ways to make smoothies. For example, try using frozen blackberries,



strawberries, and raspberries with vanilla yogurt to make a mixed berry smoothie; or spinach and banana with plain yogurt to make a simple green smoothie. Try different combinations to see what children like best.

Of course, water is a great beverage for those in-between meals and snack times. Water should be available throughout the day to give the children the fluid their bodies need. It is a great thirst quencher and rehydrates without adding calories. Providing water also teaches children that not all beverages need to be flavored.

On the contrary, juice drinks that contain little or no real juice, sports drinks, and soda, add sugar to the diet with very few nutrients. Serving these beverages to children is discouraged because they add additional calories to the regular diet, leading children to consume more calories than needed.

Choosing a healthy beverage that meets the CACFP meal pattern and drinking water between meals can help children add more nutrients into their day and satisfy the request for something to drink. For more information on healthy beverages, visit *Rethink Your Drink* ([http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy\\_eating/drinks.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/drinks.html)).

## References

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