

Infant Meal Pattern

Birth Through 11 Months

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Illinois State Board of Education
 Nutrition Department
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The Infant Meal Pattern lists the food to be offered infants from birth through 11 months. The infant meal must contain each of the following components in the amounts indicated for the appropriate age group in order to qualify for reimbursement.

Child care institutions and family day care home providers should:

- Work closely with parents to decide what foods to serve infants.
- Offer food with texture and consistency appropriate for the development of the infant.
- Serve food during times consistent with the infant's eating habits. For example, lunch components may be served at two feedings between noon and 2 p.m.
- Solid foods are introduced at 6 months or when developmentally appropriate for the infant. The provider should work with the parent to determine when solid foods should be served.

MEAL	FOOD COMPONENTS	AGE	
		Birth Through 5 Months	6 Through 11 Months
Breakfast/ Lunch/ Supper	Breast Milk ¹ or Iron Fortified Infant Formula ² ;	4-6 fluid ounces	6-8 fluid ounces; AND
	Iron Fortified Infant Cereal ^{2,3} Meat ⁵ , Fish ⁵ , Poultry ⁵ , Whole Egg ⁵ , Cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils ⁵ , OR Cheese ⁵ ; OR Cottage Cheese ⁵ ; OR Yogurt ^{4,5} ; OR		0-1/2 oz eq OR 0-4 tablespoons OR 0-2 ounces 0-4 ounces (volume) 0-4 ounces or ½ cup; OR a combination of the above AND
	Vegetable ⁶ or Fruit ⁶ , or a combination of both ^{5,6}		0-2 tablespoons
Snack	Breast Milk ¹ or Iron Fortified Infant Formula ²	4-6 fluid ounces	2-4 fluid ounces AND
	Iron Fortified Infant Cereal ^{2,3}		0-1/2 oz eq OR
	Ready-To-Eat Breakfast Cereal ^{3,5,7,8}		0-1/4 oz eq OR
	Crackers ^{3,7}		0-1/4 oz eq OR
	Bread ^{3,7}		0-1/2 oz eq AND
	Vegetable ⁶ or Fruit ⁶ , or a combination of both ^{5,6}		0-2 tablespoons

¹Breast milk or formula, or portions of both, must be served; however, it is recommended that breast milk be served from birth through 11 months. For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum amount of breast milk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breast milk may be offered, with additional breast milk offered at a later time if the infant will consume more.

²Infant formula and dry infant cereal must be iron-fortified.

³Information on crediting grain items may be found in FNS guidance.

⁴Through Sept. 30, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces. By Oct. 1, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce).

⁵A serving of this component is required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.

⁶Fruit and vegetable juices must not be served.

⁷A serving of grains must be whole grain-rich, enriched meal, enriched flour, bran, or germ.

⁸Through Sept. 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce. By Oct. 1, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.

Required Guidelines for Infant Meals

Responsibilities of the Child Care Providers— All childcare providers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program must provide all the infant components appropriate for the age of the infant according to the Infant Meal Pattern. This includes:

- At least one iron-fortified infant formula which meets the definition of infant formula. It is recommended the childcare provider select an infant formula that satisfies the needs of one or more of the infants in your care.
- Iron-fortified dry infant cereal.

The childcare provider must feed the infant themselves to receive reimbursement. However, providers may receive reimbursement for meals when a breastfeeding mother comes to the day care center or home and directly breastfeed her infant.

Infants birth through 11 months of age **must** be offered food from the Infant Meal Pattern. When they reach 12 months of age, follow the Meal Pattern for Children 1 Through 12 years of age.

Infant Formula— The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines iron-fortified infant formula as a product “which contains 1 milligram or more of iron in a quantity of product that supplies 100 kilocalories when prepared in accordance with label directions for infant consumption.”

The childcare provider must offer at least one type of iron-fortified infant formula, milk-based or soy-based, intended solely as a food for normal, healthy infants served in a liquid state according to manufacturer’s recommended dilution. An infant’s meal containing only parent or guardian provided creditable infant formula that is served to the infant by the childcare provider is eligible for reimbursement.

Refer to the Solid Infant Foods section when an infant becomes developmentally ready for other foods.

Breast Milk— The decision whether to breast-feed an infant is up to the infant’s mother. Parents may elect to decline the offered infant formula and supply their own breast milk.

An infant’s meal containing **only** breast milk (expressed by the mother or breastfed on site), as specified on the Infant Meal Pattern, can be claimed for reimbursement. It is acceptable to serve the infant less than the stated minimum portion of breast milk. If the full portion is not initially offered and the infant drinks all of it, additional breast milk must be offered if the infant is still hungry.

A meal served to an infant that contains a portion of breast milk and an additional amount of infant formula is reimbursable as long as the total number of ounces offered to the infant meets, or exceeds, the minimum amount for breast milk/formula as specified on the Infant Meal Pattern.

Expressed Breastmilk Storage— Refer to your local Public Health Department for guidance. In the “Pediatric Nutrition Handbook, 7th Edition,” the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends an optimal storage time of 72 hours for refrigerated expressed breast milk. Accordingly, to follow current scientific recommendations, breast milk may be stored at the center or day care home in a refrigerator for no longer than 72 hours. The previously established standard was 48 hours from the time it was collected. FNS made this change via policy guidance in 2015 to support breastfeeding practices and increase flexibility for centers and day care homes. Bottles of expressed breast milk must be stored in a refrigerator kept at 40^o Fahrenheit or below. This is consistent with recommendations from the AAP and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers and day care homes should continue to follow all other breast milk handling and storage guidelines listed in “Feeding Infants: A Guide for Child Nutrition Programs” (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/cacfp/feeding-infants>).

Developmentally Ready— An infant’s developmental readiness determines which foods should be fed, what texture the foods should be, and which feeding style to use. All infants develop at their own rate. Although age and size often correspond with developmental readiness, these should not be used as sole considerations for deciding what and how to feed infants. It is important to be aware of infants rapidly developing mouth abilities and hand and body control, so you know the appropriate food and texture to serve them at each stage of their development. On the Infant Meal Pattern for 6 through 11 months of age, you will see foods listed under the category “When Developmentally Ready.” If an infant is developmentally ready, you must offer these foods to the infant.

When talking with parents or guardians about when to serve solid foods to infants in care, the following guidelines from the AAP can help determine if an infant is developmentally ready to begin eating solid foods:

- The infant is able to sit in a highchair, feeding seat, or infant seat with good head control;

- The infant opens his or her mouth when food comes his or her way. He or she may watch others eat, reach for food, and seem eager to be fed;
- The infant can move food from a spoon into his or her throat; and
- The infant has doubled his or her weight and weighs about 13 pounds or more.

Infant Cereal — Any iron-fortified dry cereal specially formulated for and generally recognized as cereal for infants that is routinely mixed with breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula prior to consumption.

Solid Infant Foods — The decision to begin offering infant solid foods should be made by the infant's doctor and parent/guardian. When the infant is 6 through 11 months of age and developmentally ready for solid foods, those foods listed on the Infant Meal Pattern under "When Developmentally Ready" must be served to the infant. A parent may supply one component of the reimbursable meal. If a parent supplies one component for their infant, the meal can be claimed **only** when the meal meets the Infant Meal Pattern requirements and the childcare provider purchases and serves the remaining components according to the Infant Meal Pattern.

A childcare provider may puree/grind regular food to the appropriate consistency for infants. However, a childcare center must meet food service sanitation requirements to prepare infant food. If commercial baby food is purchased, it must meet the specified requirements.

Infant Formula/Food Waiver Notification — The "Infant Formula/Food Waiver Notification," online at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/CACFP-infant-formula-food-waiver-67-90.pdf>, lets the parent know the specific brand of iron-fortified infant formula and types of baby food purchased by the child care institution. The notification provides official documentation of the parent's decision to accept and decline the infant formula, infant cereal, and/or baby food offered by the childcare provider. For childcare providers, this document may be completed and signed by the parent and kept on file for **all** infants.

Medical Statement — If the parent provides an infant formula that does not meet the USDA definition of infant formula such as, infant formula labeled "low-iron" or those specifically formulated for infants with inborn errors of metabolism or digestive or absorptive problems do not meet the infant meal pattern requirement or if the parent wants the infant to receive cow's milk before one year of age, a medical statement signed by a physician is required in order to receive reimbursement. The medical statement must be kept on file. The Medical Authority Modified Meal Request Form can be found on our website at: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Medical-Authority-Modified-Meal-Request-Form.pdf>

For more information, refer to <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/cacfp/feeding-infants> publication.

Commercial Baby Food

This chart will help to clarify the food items that meet the Infant Meal Pattern and are creditable. The food items offer greater flexibility for child care providers to make more nutritious meals available to infants. The foods are grouped by type. This is not an all-inclusive list of foods that can be offered to infants, but only those that need clarification. Refer to the “Crediting Foods Guide” section on crediting foods for infants for further information.

Fruit and Vegetable	Creditable	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Food Items		
Fruit and mixed fruit, vegetables and mixed vegetables (appropriate consistency for infant) Fruit or vegetables must be the <u>first ingredient on the jar label</u>	X	
Combination <u>dinners</u> that list fruit or vegetable as the first ingredient on the label		X
Jarred baby <u>cereal</u> with fruit		X
<u>Pudding</u> or <u>dessert</u> with fruit as the first ingredient on the label		X
Fruit or vegetable containing DHA (docosahexaenoic)		X
Fruit or vegetable juice		X
Comments		
Child care providers should carefully read the ingredient listing on commercial baby fruits and vegetables. Some brands of commercial baby fruits and vegetables contain food starch, tapioca, cheese, or rice with <u>water listed as the first ingredient</u> . Remember, if a label states the <u>first ingredient is water</u> , then the product is not creditable.		

Meat/Meat Alternate	Creditable	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Food Items		
Strained baby food meats	X	
Egg	X	
Combination meat <u>dinners</u>		X
Meat sticks or “finger sticks” (miniature hot dogs)		X
Hot dogs, sausage		X
Fish or seafood — canned with bones, breaded or battered		X
Yogurt – must contain no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces	X	
Nuts, seeds, and nut and/or seed butters		X
Comments		
There are a variety of reasons the food products listed above are not creditable: The actual amount of meat in the product is difficult to determine, the manufacturers did not develop the product to be consumed by infants, and/or the products can cause an infant to choke.		

Bread and Crackers	Creditable	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Food Items		
Breads: white, wheat, whole wheat, French, Italian, and similar breads	X	
Biscuits	X	
Bagels	X	

Bread and Crackers (cont'd.)	Creditable	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Food Items		
English muffins	X	
Pita bread: white, wheat, whole wheat	X	
Rolls: white, wheat, whole wheat, potato	X	
Crackers: saltines or snack, matzo, animal, graham made without honey (Honey, even in baked goods, could possibly contain clostridium botulinum spores, which can cause a type of serious food borne illness in infants.)	X	
Soft tortillas: wheat or corn	X	
Zwieback	X	
Teething biscuits	X	
Comment		
<p>The Grains/Breads Instruction that accompanies the Meal Pattern for children ages 1 through 12 years is not applicable for infants. The only grain/bread products included in the Infant Meal Pattern are infant cereal, crusty bread, and cracker-type products. Since infants develop their eating, chewing, and swallowing skills slowly, infants should be gradually introduced to a variety of foods during the first year of life. Not all grain/bread alternates are appropriate for them.</p> <p>The bread and cracker-type products must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour and suitable for an infant to consume as finger food. None of the products should contain nuts, seeds, or hard pieces of whole-grain kernels.</p> <p>The above bread-type items must be prepared in a form suitable for an infant's development to reduce the chance of choking. The best way to serve breads to infants is to cut it into small, thin strips.</p> <p>Do not serve honey, including that cooked or baked in products such as honey graham crackers, to infants less than one year of age. Honey may contain clostridium botulinum spores, which can be extremely harmful to infants.</p>		

Infant Cereal	Creditable	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Food Items		
Iron-fortified dry cereal formulated for and generally recognized as cereal for infants is routinely mixed with either iron-fortified infant formula or breast milk prior to eating	X	
Iron-fortified dry infant cereal containing fruit		X
Commercial jarred baby food cereal that is ready to serve		X
Ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (cold dry) at Snack ONLY and must contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce	X	
Breakfast cereals — oatmeal (cooked)		X
Comment		
<p>Ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (cold dry) and cooked cereal (oatmeal and farina) are not considered <i>iron-fortified, dry infant cereal</i>.</p>		

Before giving an infant a new food, check with the parents to be certain the infant has been offered the food before and had no reaction to the food. If the child is allergic to certain food(s) which prevents the childcare provider from meeting the meal pattern, have a Medical Exception Statement for Food Substitutions completed by a medical physician and keep on file. The Medical Exception Statement for Food Substitutions can be found on our website at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Medical-Authority-Modified-Meal-Request-Form.pdf>.

Non-creditable foods may be served to infants but cannot be counted towards meeting the meal pattern requirement. These food items may be fed in addition to the required meal patterns.

INFANT CYCLE MENU

Written and dated menus are required. Since the variety of foods eaten by infants is limited, using a cycle menu is an easy way to meet the requirement and inform parents of the variety of foods offered by the childcare provider. The cycle menu is followed daily and offers choices for infants. List baby foods offered in the chart below by food component.

Month _____ Year _____

MEAL	FOOD COMPONENTS	AGE Birth through 5 Months	AGE 6 through 11 Months
Breakfast/ Lunch/ Supper	Breast Milk or Iron Fortified Infant Formula	4-6 fluid ounces	6-8 fluid ounces (AND)
	Vegetable and/or Fruit Examples: Carrots, squash, bananas, green beans, applesauce and/or peaches		0-2 tablespoons (AND)
	Iron Fortified Infant Cereal Rice or oatmeal infant cereal		0-4 tablespoons (OR)
	Meat/Meat Alternate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chicken, fish, beef, whole egg, cooked dry beans or peas OR • cheese OR • cottage cheese OR • yogurt 		0-4 tablespoons 0-2 ounces 0-4 ounces 0-4 ounces; OR a combination of the above
Snack	Breast Milk or Iron Fortified Infant Formula	4-6 fluid ounces	2-4 fluid ounces (AND)
	Vegetable and/or Fruit Carrots, squash, bananas, green beans, applesauce and/or peaches		0-2 tablespoons (AND)
	Iron Fortified Infant Cereal or Ready-To-Eat Breakfast Cereal* Rice or oatmeal infant cereal		0-4 tablespoons (OR)
	Crackers* Examples: teething biscuits, saltine crackers		0-1/4 oz eq (OR)
	Bread* Examples: Wheat bread (dry or toasted), roll		0-1/2 oz eq

*When developmentally ready

Baby Foods:

Vegetables Offered:	
Fruit Offered:	
Iron Fortified Infant Cereal Offered:	
Bread/Bread Alternate Offered:	
Meat/Meat Alternate Offered:	



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CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM
INFANT FORMULA/FOOD WAIVER
NOTIFICATION

NUTRITION DEPARTMENT

NAME OF CHILD CARE CENTER/HOME	NAME OF INFANT	BIRTH DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)

For Parent/Guardian of Infants Age Birth Through 11 Months

This child care center/day care home participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and is required to follow the Infant Meal Pattern for infants ages birth through 11 months. Solid foods are introduced at 6 months or when developmentally appropriate for the infant. The child care center/day care home should work with you to determine when solid foods should be served. To better meet your personal preferences and your infant's needs, please complete this document.

Instructions: The center/home **should** complete this section before giving to the parent/guardian.

This child care center/day care home will provide: Iron-fortified infant formula (list brand) _____ + _____ ;

Iron-fortified infant cereal (list type such as baby rice cereal) _____ ; and

Food appropriate for infants: Commercial baby food and/or
 Table food offered at the appropriate consistency for the development of the infant.

Instructions: The parent/guardian should answer the following question and mark one of the choices from each of the three sections below; then sign and date this form.

- What do you currently feed your infant?** Iron-fortified infant formula
 Breast milk
 Low-iron or another type of infant formula provided for medical reasons. I will obtain and provide the center/home with a Physician's Statement for Food Substitutions.

The parent or guardian would like their infant to be fed the following while in care:

Section 1 – Infant Formula or Breast Milk

- Choice 1:** I want my infant to receive the child care center/day care home-provided iron-fortified infant formula identified above. I will not bring infant formula from home.
- Choice 2:** I understand I am not required to bring infant formula that I purchase or receive from Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), however, I want to bring my own formula/breast milk.
List brand/type: _____
If I should forget to bring infant formula/breast milk, the child care center/home will contact me immediately and I may request they serve my infant the child care center/day care home-provided iron-fortified infant formula that day.
- Choice 3:** I want to directly breastfeed my infant on site. If I should be unable to breastfeed my infant on-site, I may request child care center/day care home serve my infant the child care center/day care home provided iron-fortified formula that day, or I may bring expressed breast milk that day.

Section 2 – Infant Cereal

- Choice 1:** I want my infant to receive the child care center/day care home-provided iron-fortified infant cereal identified above. I will not bring infant cereal from home.
- Choice 2:** I understand that I am not required to bring iron-fortified infant cereal that I purchase or receive from WIC, however, I want to bring my own infant cereal.
List brand/type: _____
If I should forget to bring the cereal, the child care center/day care home will contact me immediately and I may request they serve my infant the child care center/day care home-provided iron-fortified infant cereal that day.

Section 3 – Baby Food

- Choice 1:** I want my infant to receive the child care center/day care home-provided commercial baby food identified above. I will not bring baby food from home.
- Choice 2:** I understand that I am not required to bring baby food that I purchase, prepare, or receive from WIC, however, I want to bring in my own baby food. If I should forget to bring the baby food, the child care center/day care home will contact me immediately and I may request they serve my infant the child care center/day care home-provided commercial baby food that day.

If I decide to change the selections I made above, I will complete another form.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____


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1. **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
2. **Fax:** (202) 690-7442; or
3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov

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