



Accommodating Allergies & Special Diets in the CACFP

When a child's diet is restricted due to a disability, federal law and USDA regulations require reasonable modifications to be made, at no extra charge. If you care for a child with allergies to wheat, you may start menu planning with rice, corn, or other gluten-free grains. If the child is allergic to both cow and soy milk, however, you may need to serve a milk substitute that does not meet the meal pattern requirements.

If the meal pattern cannot be met 100%, a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional is required.

Note that reasonable modifications or accommodations do not extend to substitutions or changes in your program that could put you in a severe financial strain, such as accommodating a medical statement that specifies a brand of expensive infant formula.

It's not just about the ingredients, either. You may have a child with diabetes who needs help tracking their diet, or a participant who recently had surgery and needs a soft foods diet. Every child deserves the healthiest start in life, and recognizing specific needs while making the necessary modifications helps ensure adequate and nutritious food.

Five Tips for Accommodating Allergies

1. Create separate cycle menus for common allergens to reduce time in figuring out what foods to serve.
2. Understand how to identify allergens and trace allergens using the food label.
3. Share your weekly menu, including the ingredient list, with parents and caregivers, and encourage them to share their child's preferred alternatives to allergens (i.e. seed butter instead of peanut butter).
4. Clean everything and keep separate utensils to prevent cross-contamination.
5. Holding meals in the most integrated settings possible is a requirement. For instance, you cannot isolate children with airborne allergies in a separate room during meal service.

**Eight foods are identified as major food allergens. Under the FASTER Act of 2021, sesame is being added as the ninth major food allergen, effective 1-1-23.*

Know the Major Food Allergens*



Milk



Eggs



Seafood



Shellfish



Tree Nuts



Peanuts



Sesame



Soybeans



Wheat

Five Tips for Accommodating Special Diets

1. Understand the difference between preference vs. disability (supported/not supported by medical statement).
2. Incorporate dietary needs into the overall weekly menu instead of modifying one specific participant's meal.
3. Seek out modifications rather than alternatives when possible (i.e. pureeing carrots for a soft diet).
4. Show patience towards participants whose special dietary needs may cause them to eat slower.
5. Educate children and family about how some eat differently than others to help destigmatize special diets.

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