

# The Child and Adult Care Food Program Supports Good Nutrition in Quality Child Care

## CACFP Supports Good Nutrition



The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a federal nutrition program, promotes high-quality, affordable child care by helping care providers to serve nutritious meals and snacks.

The program provides reimbursement for food, meal preparation, training and administration costs. CACFP is a vital source of support for child care centers, Head Start centers, and family day care homes.

CACFP provides high-quality nutrition to nearly three million children each working day, helping low-income children receive the nutrients they need to grow.

The program is a well documented success:

- Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, presented in ***Federal food policy and childhood obesity: A solution or part of the problem?***, showed that participation in federal child care and school meal programs, like CACFP, is associated with a lower Body Mass Index (BMI) in children, particularly low-income children.
- The Institute of Medicine, citing research on the association between participation in federal nutrition programs, improved diet quality and decreased risk of overweight among children, identified increasing participating in CACFP as a strategy to promote healthy eating in the report ***Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Overweight***.

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- The ***Children's HealthWatch study*** compared low-income children who receive meals from providers who likely participate in CACFP to children who rely on food from home. Children who received food from their provider were 62% less likely to be in fair or poor health and 64% less likely to have been hospitalized. These children were also more likely to be a healthy height and weight for their age.
- In a study of child care providers, ***It's 12 O'clock...What Are Our Preschoolers Eating For Lunch?***, those who participated in CACFP were more likely to serve whole grains and milk. The food served at participating family day care homes was nutritionally superior to food at non-participating homes. And the food served by providers was far healthier than meals brought from home, which featured fewer fruits, vegetables, milk, or lean meats but more snack foods, desserts, and fruit drinks.
- In ***Dietary Intake and Health Outcomes among Young Children Attending 2 Urban Day-Care Centers***, researchers compared the intake of children at a CACFP-participating center to children at a similar center who brought food from home. Children at the participating center consumed significantly more milk/dairy and vegetable servings while eating fewer fats and sweets. They also obtained more protein, vitamin A, B vitamins, calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc. In addition, children at the participating center had fewer absences due to illness.
- The report ***Maternal Employment and Children's Nutrition Volume 1, Diet Quality and the Role of CACFP*** explored differences in diet between children cared for at home and children of employed mothers who received food through CACFP. Children in CACFP consumed more fruit and milk and a greater variety of foods while consuming less soda, other soft drinks, added sugars and fat. The report states that "*these differences especially favor children in low-income households.*" The authors concluded that "*CACFP participants' diets, on average, meet daily recommendations for food energy, protein, vitamins A and C, iron, zinc, calcium, cholesterol, and dietary fiber*" and "*meals and snacks consumed in CACFP care make a substantial and positive contribution to these children's total dietary intake.*"



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- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Evaluation of the Child Care Food Program* reported that the meals and snacks provided by child care centers and family day care homes participating in the Child Care Food Program were nutritionally superior to those provided by non-participating centers. The food provided by participating homes and centers were more nutrient-dense and supplied a higher proportion of children's daily needs for most nutrients. Participating homes and centers also had higher food quality and variety scores when compared to non-participating centers.
- The U.S. General Accounting Office's report, *Promoting Quality in Family Child Care*, cited the effectiveness of the program: *"Because of its unique combination of resources, training, and oversight, experts believe the [Child and Adult Care] food program is one of the most effective vehicles for reaching family child care providers and enhancing the care they provide."*
- A study conducted by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium reported, that *"participation in the USDA Food Program was associated with quality. This association held true for family child care providers and for infant/toddler center-based regardless of the provider's education level."* In the report, *Child Care Characteristics and Quality*, researchers recommended using CACFP as a way to expand training and educational opportunities because *"the USDA Food Program has been an important way to augment the quality of programs serving low-income children."*
- The Families and Work Institute's *Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care*, cited participation in CACFP as one of the major factors associated with quality care, reporting that 87% of the family child care homes considered to be providing good quality child care participated in CACFP.

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