

## Convenience or home cooked? Factors to consider

A family day care home provider has a few decisions to make when planning menus. One of those decisions is if and how many convenience foods to use. There are pros and cons to using convenience foods in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) menus.

### Here are a few of the pros and cons to consider:

#### Pros for convenience foods

- Consistent product
- Consistent yield, unless package size changes
- Easy to prepare

#### Cons for convenience foods

- May not meet CACFP meal pattern or component requirements
- Requires time to determine if food meets requirements
- May require additions to meet CACFP requirements that add to the cost or time to prepare
- Often high in fat, sodium, or added sugars
- Often low in dietary fiber

The cons for convenience foods may outweigh the pros. This is especially true if meal reimbursement is denied due to a convenience food that does not meet requirements.

The nutrition needs of children may be better met when foods are prepared from scratch. This allows a provider to use recipes with lower fat ingredients, seasonings other than salt, and whole grain flours for more fiber.



# Mealtime Memo FOR CHILD CARE

## **Costly Convenience**

Sometimes a convenience food that seems like a good value may have hidden costs. An example is pizza crust.

Consider this scenario.

The local grocery store has a 16-ounce frozen sausage pizza on sale for \$3.00 each. The ingredient panel shows the crust is made from enriched wheat flour. The provider uses the tools in the Grains/Breads section of the *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (access this resource online at <http://teamn nutrition.usda.gov/Resources/foodbuyingguide.html>). She determines that  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a pizza will provide one serving of grain/bread component (Group B). At \$3.00 for one pizza, a grain serving costs \$.25 each.

The provider determines that the product does not meet program requirements for meat/meat alternate. She chooses to add more cheese to the pizza to assure the requirement is met.

The result is that the children receive an entrée that is higher in fat and sodium. The provider can use other convenience foods as an option for crust.

## **Easy options for pizza crust**

Frozen bread dough is packaged in 16-ounce loaves or individual rolls. Follow package directions to thaw. Use the loaf-size dough for a large pizza or roll-size for mini pizzas. Look for whole wheat options. A 16-ounce loaf of frozen dough provides 16 servings; at \$1.00 a loaf, each serving of grain/bread costs \$.06.



### **Frozen Pizza**

A 16-ounce pizza at \$3.00 is \$3.00 a pound.



### **Frozen Bread Dough**

A loaf of frozen bread dough at \$1.00 is \$1.00 per pound.

Pizza is more than 3 times the price of bread dough for crust, because in our example the pizza provided 12 servings and the bread dough provided 16.

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Whole wheat English muffin halves are a quick and easy option. Split muffins into halves, top with sauce and cheese, and bake in the oven.

Flour tortillas make fast work of crust. Look for whole wheat or interesting flavors.

Make a rice or pasta crust. Here is an easy recipe:

- 3 cups of cooked brown rice or whole grain spaghetti noodles
- One egg
- 4 ounces of shredded part skim mozzarella cheese (about 1 cup).

Combine the ingredients and mix thoroughly. Spread on a 12-inch pizza pan or divide between two 9-inch pie plates that have been sprayed with non-stick coating. Press the rice or noodles into the pan or plate to form the crust. Bake the crust in a 450 °F oven for about 20 minutes until set. Top with sauce and pizza toppings. Return to oven for about 10 minutes to heat pizza thoroughly.

Note: Three cups of cooked rice or pasta is equal to six servings of grain/breads (Group H, ½ cup per serving).

All of these crust options provide an easy way to assure the program requirements are met. Best of all, they make quick work in the kitchen and provide a healthy choice for children.

Shopping tip: Use the unit price sticker to compare the price per pound of different crust options. For products listed in price per ounce, multiply by 16 to find the price per pound.

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## Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>½ cup applesauce (½ cup fruit)</p> <p>½ cup unsweetened cereal variety (½ cup cold dry cereal)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>½ cup fresh banana slices (½ cup fruit)</p> <p>1 Oven Baked Three Grain Pancake A-06B<sup>1</sup> (1 slice of bread)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>½ cup orange juice (½ cup fruit juice)</p> <p>½ whole grain English muffin with 1 Tbsp peanut butter<sup>2</sup> (½ slice of bread, 1 Tbsp peanut butter)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>½ cup fresh apple slices (½ cup fruit)</p> <p>1 serving Baked Scrambled Eggs D-15<sup>1</sup> (1 large egg)</p> <p>½ slice whole wheat toast (½ slice of bread)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>½ cup pink grapefruit juice (½ cup fruit juice)</p> <p>¼ cup cooked oatmeal (¼ cup cooked cereal)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>

## Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>½ cup Oven Baked Parmesan Chicken D-05<sup>1</sup> (1 ½ oz cooked poultry)</p> <p>¼ cup green beans (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>¼ cup peach halves (¼ cup fruit)</p> <p>½ whole wheat roll (½ slice of bread)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>1 Tortilla Roll-Up F-07<sup>1</sup> (1 ½ oz cooked lean meat, 1 slice of bread)</p> <p>¼ cup black beans (¼ cup cooked dry beans)</p> <p>¼ cup whole kernel corn (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>¼ cup grape halves (¼ cup fruit)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>1 piece Oven Baked Fish D-09<sup>1</sup> (1 ½ oz cooked fish)</p> <p>¼ cup baked, peeled sweet potato (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>¼ cup green peas (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>½ whole wheat roll (½ slice of bread)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>1 English muffin pizza with 1 ½ oz mozzarella cheese and 1 Tbsp pizza sauce (½ slice bread, 1 ½ oz cheese)</p> <p>¼ cup steamed broccoli and cauliflower (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>¼ cup pear halves (¼ cup fruit)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>	<p>¾ cup Beef and Spaghetti Casserole<sup>1</sup> (1 ½ oz lean meat, ¼ cup vegetable, ½ slice of bread)</p> <p>¼ cup cooked carrots (¼ cup vegetable)</p> <p>½ slice toasted French bread (½ slice of bread)</p> <p>¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)</p>

## Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>2 oz lowfat yogurt (2 oz yogurt)</p> <p>½ cup diced fresh strawberries (½ cup fruit)</p> <p>Water<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>½ oz wheat crackers (4 crackers) with 1 Tbsp peanut butter<sup>2</sup> (½ oz grains/bread, 1 Tbsp peanut butter)</p> <p>½ cup 1% milk (½ cup milk)</p> <p>Water<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>½ oz string cheese (½ oz cheese)</p> <p>¼ cup Carrot-Raisin<sup>4</sup> Salad E-05<sup>1</sup> (¼ cup vegetable and fruit)</p> <p>¼ cup apple juice (¼ cup juice)</p> <p>Water<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>1 oz lowfat cottage cheese (1 oz cottage cheese)</p> <p>½ oz graham crackers (2 crackers)</p> <p>(½ oz grains/bread)</p> <p>Water<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>1 Banana Muffin A-04<sup>1</sup> (1 slice of bread)</p> <p>½ cup 1% milk (½ cup milk)</p> <p>Water<sup>3</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup>USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org). Ages 3–5.

<sup>2</sup>Sunflower butter may be substituted for peanut butter.

<sup>3</sup>Water is suggested as a beverage for all snacks even when other beverages are offered to encourage children to drink water.

<sup>4</sup>Raisins can be a choking hazard to young children.

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## Sources

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2007, December). *Food buying guide for child nutrition programs*. Retrieved September 13, 2009, from [www.teamnutrition.usda.gov](http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov)

Brody, J. E. (1985) *Jane Brody's good food book: Living the high-carbohydrate way*. New York: W.W. Norton Company.

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