



Family Style Meals

Summer Meal Programs provide nutritious meals to children and help children develop healthy eating habits. Serving meals family-style support these goals by allowing children and Program staff to eat together, creating a relaxing eating environment, and promoting healthy eating habits and attitudes toward food.

Go to [Resources](#).

A New Way to Teach Healthy Eating Habits

Only camps and closed enrolled summer sites have the option of serving meals family style because these settings provide a stable environment. All the foods needed to meet the meal pattern requirements are placed in serving plates or bowls on a table for children to serve themselves. The National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) recommends serving meals family style because it creates a healthful eating environment that is responsive to children's hunger and fullness cues.

- Children learn and practice social and motor skills such as taking turns; sharing; and passing, pouring, and scooping foods.
- Children may choose to take smaller portions of food and know they can take seconds if they want.
- Children are encouraged to try new foods by seeing other children and Program staff eating them.
- Program staff become good role models for children by sitting at the same table, eating the same meal as the children, and providing assistance, as needed.
- Children and Program staff can enjoy pleasant conversation with each other in a friendly, supportive family-like environment.

Requirements for Serving Meals Family Style

- A sufficient amount of food must be placed on each table to provide the required portions of each of the food components for all children at the table and any Program staff eating with the children.
- Children must be allowed to select food components and the size of the initial serving. Children should initially be offered the full required portion of each food component.



05/27/16



- When a child does not initially take the full required portion of a food component, it is the Program staff's responsibility to actively encourage the child to accept the full required portion of each food component. For example, if a child initially refuses a food component, or initially does not take the full required portion of a food component, Program staff should offer the food component to the child again.

Try These Best Practices

- Have all the food placed on the table at the beginning of the meal.
- Think about children's ability to serve themselves. Seat children who may need more help near Program staff. Start by letting children serve themselves something easy, such as a piece of bread, then gradually increase the number and variety of foods they serve themselves.
- Offer individual components in a family style manner, particularly when smaller children are being served or when a new food item is being introduced.
- Expects spills and show children how to handle them.
- Encourage children to try new foods and praise them when they do.
- Make positive statements when discussing the food and meal and encourage children to do the same. Avoid using negative or pressuring statements.
- Provide adequate time for all children to finish eating.
- Demonstrate good table manners and healthy eating.
- Start a conversation with the children at the table.

Be Aware of Food Safety Considerations

- Understand and follow State or local health requirements for serving meals family style to prevent any possible food safety issues.
- Keep food at the proper temperatures.
- Use appropriate and clean containers and utensils to serve the meal.
- Make sure all children and Program staff wash their hands before the meal.





Resources

USDA

- *7 CFR 225.16, Meal service requirements*
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d87b1089e455f65409bd1dbf463b3686&node=pt7.4.225&rgn=div5%20-%20se7.4.225_116#se7.4.225_116
- *SP 05-2016, SFSP 05-2016: Meal Service Requirements in the Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/meal-service-requirements-summer-meal-programs-questions-and-answers>
- *Nutrition Guidance*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NutritionGuide.pdf>
- *Best Practices: Meal Service*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/best-practices-meal-service>
- *Summer Meals Toolkit*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>
 - *Congregate Meals*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Congregate_Meals.pdf
 - *Leftover Meals*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Leftover_Meals.pdf
 - *Meal Service Times*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Meal_Times.pdf
 - *Offer Versus Serve*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-OVS.pdf>
 - *Serving Adults*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Adult_Meals.pdf
- *Team Nutrition Healthy Meals Resource System Feeding Environment and General Resources*
<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/cacfp-wellness-resources-child-care-providers/feeding-environment/feeding-environment>





Institute of Child Nutrition

- *The Basic Guide to Family Style Dining - Part 1*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20130815085751.pdf>
- *Planning and Preparing: Family Style Dining - Part 2*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20131004114651.pdf>
- *Happy Meal Times with Family Style Meals*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100917032729.pdf>

For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and achievable for your Program. For additional questions, sponsors and the general public should contact their State agency for help. State agencies should contact their Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Office.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

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