Special Dietary Needs and the CACFP

USDA requires Programs make reasonable modifications to accommodate participants with disabilities to provide equal opportunity to participate. This is required only when supported by a written medical statement from Wisconsin Licensed Healthcare Professional: Physician, Physician Assistant, or Nurse Practitioner (APNP).

**What is a disability?**
Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (includes eating, breathing, digestive and respiratory functions, etc.). Most physical and mental impairments will constitute a disability, it does not need to be life threatening.
Ex. Digestion is impaired by lactose intolerance, whether or not consuming milk causes severe distress.

**What is NOT a disability?**
Eating certain foods or eliminating foods from the diet due to a general health concern and/or preference.
Ex. Request that a participant does not drink cow’s milk because of a preference, not because the participant has lactose intolerance.

**DISABILITY**
Supported by a valid written medical statement

- Program must offer a reasonable modification* that effectively accommodates the participant’s disability & provides equal opportunity to participate in CACFP.
- Modification(s) may or may not meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.
- Meals are reimbursable (whether or not the CACFP meal pattern is met).

*Reasonable Modification:
- Related to disability or limitations caused by disability
- Determinations for how to accommodate a participant must be made on a case-by-case basis
- Saying ‘no’ to providing a modification is almost never appropriate
- Not required to provide exact substitution or other modification requested. For ex., not required to provide a particular brand name, but must offer a substitute that does not contain the specific allergen

Effectively accommodate ALL participants with the same type of disability: Design a plan to accommodate common disabilities. Many can be managed within CACFP meal pattern when a variety of foods is available. Examples:
- Offer one type of lactose-free milk to accommodate lactose intolerance. This effectively accommodates lactose intolerance, thus meets the requirement for a reasonable accommodation.
- Have a variety of fruits on hand, so participant’s with an allergy to a particular fruit can be served a different fruit.

**Written Medical Statement Must Provide:**
Information about:
1. The impairment (reason for request)
2. How it restricts the diet
3. How to accommodate the impairment

For food allergy, statement should include:
1. The food(s) to be avoided (allergen)
2. Brief explanation of how exposure to the food affects the participant
3. Recommended substitution(s)

Seek clarification if statement is unclear or lacks sufficient detail so that a proper and safe meal can be provided.

Must be from a WI Licensed Healthcare Professional: Physician, Physician Assistant, or Nurse Practitioner (APNP).

**Examples of Medical Statements**

**ACCEPTABLE:**

- STATEMENT
  Cal is lactose intolerant and cannot drink cow’s milk. He should be served almond milk.
  Dr. Dan Physician

**NOT ACCEPTABLE:**

- STATEMENT
  Serve Sam almond milk.
  Dr. Dan Physician

Disability not supported by a valid medical statement:
Programs may choose to accommodate requests related to a disability not supported by a valid medical statement from a WI Licensed Healthcare Professional if the requested modifications can be made while meeting CACFP meal pattern requirements. Such meals are reimbursable.
Examples of non-disability special dietary need requests:

- **Non-dairy milk substitute not nutritionally equivalent to cow’s milk**
  - Not credible
  - When served, meals and snacks cannot be claimed for reimbursement

- **Ethnic, religious, vegetarian**
  - Programs may choose to supply credible food(s) and/or a credible beverage substitute. Meals and snacks can be claimed for reimbursement
  - Parents may choose to provide **ONE** credible component; the Program must supply all other components with credible foods. Meals and snacks can be claimed for reimbursement

Meals accommodation(s) that meet CACFP meal pattern requirements are reimbursable

Meals accommodation(s) that do not meet CACFP meal pattern requirements are not reimbursable

**Written Statement from Parent/Guardian:**

1. Identifies the non-disability special dietary need, including foods not to be served and allowable substitutions
2. May include a statement that the parent/guardian chooses to provide foods (if applicable)

Accommodate requests within the meal pattern:

- **Offer one type of creditable soymilk**
  - to accommodate participants requesting a non-dairy beverage. Because this modification is creditable, the meal meets CACFP requirements and is reimbursable
  - Accommodate vegetarian eaters by serving creditable meat alternates

**Parent Provided Component:**

A parent/guardian may choose to provide **one** creditable component towards a reimbursable meal for a non-disability special dietary need

- **Religious**
- **Ethnic**
- **Lifestyle preference (organic, vegetarian)**
- **Other**
  - **Health reason not supported by a valid written medical statement**

**Special Dietary Needs Tracking Form:**

1. Complete for each participant accommodated with a disability or non-disability special dietary need
2. Keep form and documentation, as specified, on file

**Call or email your consultant when you have a question about special diet needs**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.
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What to Do Next:

**Designate Responsible Staff**
- Designate staff responsible for managing all special dietary needs. This point person will ensure:
  - Valid documentation is on file for participants with disabilities and participants’ needs are met
  - Meals/snacks for non-disability special dietary needs meet CACFP meal pattern requirements
  - Only creditable meals/snacks for non-disability special dietary needs are claimed for reimbursement

**Obtain Appropriate Documentation**
- Special Dietary Needs Tracking Form complete for each participant with a disability or non-disability special dietary need request
- Disability: Written medical statement for physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Must be signed by a Wisconsin Licensed Healthcare Professional (Physician, Physician Assistant, Advanced Nurse Practitioner (APNP))
- Non-disability special dietary need: Written statement from parent/guardian for special dietary request

**Train Staff on Accommodating Disabilities**
- Inform staff that all meals/snacks must meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.
- Participants with a disability that affects the diet must be accommodated. It is vital to follow the directive of a written medical statement to ensure the safety of a participant.
- Kitchen staff must know how to properly manage special dietary needs and make substitutions (ex. know appropriate food substitutions, reading labels for food allergens).
- Classroom staff must inform the designated staff responsible for managing special dietary needs when a parent/guardian brings in a food/beverage to the classroom so the request can be handled appropriately.
- Staff completing meal counts must know that meals/snacks CANNOT be claimed when:
  - A participant is served a meal or snack that does not meet meal pattern requirements unless the participant is being accommodated for a disability that is supported with a written medical statement
  - A participant is served non-creditable food item(s) provided by the Program or the parent/guardian
  - A participant is served more than one component supplied by the parent/guardian
  - Examples:
    - Non-creditable milk substitute is provided by Program or parent/guardian
    - Parent/guardian provides two components of a meal, ex. the grain and meat alternate
    - Parent/guardian provides a non-creditable component, ex. non-creditable meatless substitute

**Menu Evaluation**
- Review menus and determine if your program will design a meal plan within the CACFP meal pattern to accommodate common disabilities or other non-disability requests. Examples:
  - Offer lactose-free milk to accommodate participants with lactose intolerance
  - Offer a creditable non-dairy milk substitute nutritionally equivalent to cow’s milk
  - Offer a daily vegetarian option