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## **Menu Guidance for the Older Californians Nutrition Program**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

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1. Is there guidance for participants bringing outside snacks or desserts into congregate sites?  
There are no specific requirements for snacks or desserts from outside sources since they would not be counted as meals. Snacks and desserts provided should follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (limit added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium). Allowability is up to the AAA and local county health department requirements. If allowed, some considerations would be to have the items on a table, separate from the meal preparation and service area, for participants to take if desired. You may also consider limiting the frequency of when outside snacks or desserts are offered.
2. If we serve desserts that are sugar-free, like sugar-free pudding, are we allowed to serve them two times per week?  
Providing a sugar-free dessert limits added sugars when providing as an additional menu item. It is acceptable to provide a sugar-free dessert two times per week if the dessert is not high in saturated fat, however, it is ideal to consider fruit as dessert which is a more nutrient-dense option. Per the OCNP Menu Guidance, desserts high in saturated fat, added sugars, and/or refined grains should be limited to no more than once a week and should be an optional element of the meal.
3. For a contractor that provides two meals per day, serving both breakfast and lunch in a congregate setting, do the breakfast meals always need to include all 5 vegetable subgroups each week as long as the DGAs/DRIs are met?  
When providing 2 meals per day, meals can be combined to meet the menu requirements. For example, instead of providing a vegetable serving at breakfast, 2 vegetable servings can be provided at lunch.  
The requirement for vegetables is to include 1-2 servings per meal and menu planners should strive to provide foods from each of the 5 subgroups each week. Meals would still be in compliance if they do not include each of the 5 subgroups each week, as long as meals contain at least 1 vegetable serving per meal (or at least 2 servings if providing 2 meals per day).
4. How should we advise providers who serve fruit juice daily instead of fruit to save on costs?  
The menu guidance implies that juice is allowed every day.  
As noted in the OCNP Menu Guidance, at least half of the recommended amount of fruit should come from whole fruit, rather than 100% juice. 100% fruit juice should be limited to

no more than two servings per week if serving 5 meals per week. Fruit that is fresh, canned, or frozen is preferred over fruit juice as juice lacks dietary fiber and has a high glycemic index that can significantly increase blood glucose in individuals with diabetes.

5. In order to meet the vitamin C requirement of 25mg per meal, can vitamin C content be counted from more than one food group per meal?

The vitamin C requirement of 25mg must be met per meal, rather than a weekly average, since vitamin C is a water-soluble vitamin. If using the component meal pattern, it is easiest to include one high vitamin C food (containing  $\geq 25\text{mg}$ ) in each meal rather than combining items together to meet the requirement. If needing to use 2 foods to meet the vitamin C requirement, denote both as vitamin C sources on the component meal pattern. If using nutrition analysis, the analysis will ensure that the vitamin C requirement is met, even if coming from multiple food sources.

6. Can vitamin A content from milk, rather than from foods rich in vitamin A, meet the weekly vitamin A requirement?

Meals should include a high vitamin A food source 2 to 3 times per week in addition to other lower sources of vitamin A, such as milk. This ensures obtaining vitamin A from a variety of food sources, such as fruits and vegetables, which include fiber and other nutrients. Note that the requirement is reduced from 3 times per week from the previous menu guidance.

7. I am not in support of cheese not being a protein option for meals. Do you know the reason for that change with the dietary guidelines?

The change in the current OCNP Menu Guidance from the CDA 2012 menu guidance is to align with the DGAs which categorizes cheese as part of the Dairy/Soy Alternatives group rather than the protein group. Cheese still contributes to the overall protein content of the meal but does not count as a serving for the protein group. Each meal should contain a minimum of a 2-ounce protein equivalent from the protein group and then the remainder of the 15g per meal protein requirement may be met by also counting the grams of protein provided from the dairy/soy alternatives group.

8. When cheese is offered as a Dairy/Soy Alternative serving and in an entrée, does it need to be low sodium and low-fat?

When using cheese on a menu, selecting a cheese that is low-fat and has a lower sodium content is preferred. This will help to limit added saturated fat and keeping within the target of 760 mg of sodium per meal.

9. At congregate sites, does there need to be signage posted regarding leftovers that specifically says, “take food home at your own risk”, or “food is to be consumed on site”?

There is no requirement regarding signage for taking leftovers, such as “taking food at your own risk”. It is up to the AAA/service provider to determine if leftovers will be allowed and, if allowed, to develop a policy including signage to be posted.

10. What is an adequate time for new providers to be trained on menu planning and the meal component pattern when staffing may change with little notice? Do providers need to stop meal service for this training or is there a reasonable transition?

There are no specific requirements regarding the amount of time required to train new providers on the menu guidance or nutrient analysis requirements. Per CCR 7636.5, all staff, paid and volunteer, shall be oriented and trained to perform their assigned responsibilities and tasks. In the transition period for a new menu planner, programs could utilize previous existing menu cycles.

To ensure participants continue to receive meals and nutrition program services, providers would not stop meal service during the transition and training period.

11. What if a contracted meal vendor cannot meet all of the nutritional requirements for meals?

If a meal vendor is unable to meet all the nutritional requirements for meals, AAAs or nutrition providers can supplement meals with missing components. For example, if a meal vendor provides frozen meals that do not contain a fruit serving with each meal, a fruit serving can be supplemented and served in addition to the frozen meals. When procuring a meal vendor, it is important to be specific regarding the nutritional requirements for meals to determine potential food groups that may need to be supplemented with missing components.

12. We are looking for free resources for our providers to calculate nutrients when creating menus/recipes. Do any AAA RDs have a favorite resource that your providers use?

Some options shared by the AAA RD network include:

- Cronometer
- ESHA Food Processor
- Computrition
- Webtrition

13. We appreciate this opportunity to ask nutrition program related questions. Are there plans in place to continue nutrition program virtual meetings - at least on a quarterly basis?

We hope to have nutrition program webinars/venues for AAAs to ask questions as needed. Please email the nutrition team at [CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov](mailto:CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov) with any specific topics of interest.

14. In the past, there was discussion about sharing pre-approved RD menus between AAAs. Is there a list of RDs that we can reference?

This is a great idea for AAA RDs to collaborate on helpful and successful menu planning strategies. We will send a list of AAA RD email addresses for AAA RD collaboration.

15. Can the resource links also be provided in a follow up email along with the slide deck?

[OCNP Webpage](#)

[OCNP Menu Guidance](#)

[Sample Component Meal Pattern](#)

[DGA](#)

[Eat Healthy: Older Adults](#)

[Cut Down on Sodium](#)

CDA Nutrition Team mailbox: [CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov](mailto:CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov)

16. How do I get added to the CDA email distribution list?

Here is the process to have your name added or removed from the CDA email distribution list directory:

- Send an email to [AAAContactInfo@aging.ca.gov](mailto:AAAContactInfo@aging.ca.gov) to request a contact report.
- CDA will send you instructions on updating the contact report.
- Once approved by your AAA director, CDA will add your name to the email distribution list for your position (e.g., AAA RD, Title IIIC Coordinator, etc.).