Current Requirement: Fruit juice is a required part of the daily CACFP meal pattern. Fruit can be served fresh, frozen, canned, dried, or as 100% fruit juice. For children over 7 months, fruit juice can satisfy the fruit requirement except when milk is served at snack-time as the only other component.

USDA’s Proposed Rule: USDA proposed that juice should not be served to children before the age of 1 year. No prohibitions on juice are included for older children.

Our Recommendation: As recommended by the IOM Committee on CACFP, for children 1 year and older, fruit rather than fruit juice should be served at most meals and snacks. Further, only 100% fruit juice with no added sugar ever should be served, and that should be limited to one age-appropriate serving per day.

Rationale: Fruit juice intake, even when it is 100% juice, is a concern. Juice intake has increased overall among children 5 years old and younger compared to 3 decades ago, with largest increases in Latino and African American children. Fruit juice may contribute to children’s excessive calories from beverages. Further, 100% fruit juice has several nutritional disadvantages compared to whole fruit:

1) juice has little or no dietary fiber;
2) prolonged, excessive, or frequent exposure could lead to dental caries, though evidence is inconsistent;
3) calories in liquid form provide less satiety, can be consumed more quickly, and may elicit a weaker compensatory response than calories consumed as solid foods.

On the other hand, limited consumption of 100% juice may be justified for several reasons. While U.S. children have slightly increased their whole fruit consumption in recent years, approximately two-thirds of children 2-18 years old still do not consume recommended amounts of fruit. Children’s adherence to the fruit intake recommendations is among the lowest of any sector of the US population. Intake of 100% fruit juice:

1) contributes to meeting fruit consumption requirements; approximately 40% of total fruit intake in preschoolers is from fruit juice, and the effect is more pronounced in children of lower socioeconomic status;
2) has been associated with a better intake of several nutrients which are under-consumed (e.g., vitamins A and C, phosphorus and magnesium);
3) has not conclusively been associated with obesity or diabetes in children.

An additional ‘benefit’ of 100% fruit juice in the context of CACFP is that juice may lower costs by 13% as compared with fresh, frozen or canned fruit.

The evidence therefore supports the consumption of 100% fruit juice in moderate amounts. Accordingly, the 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommended no more than half of fruit servings should be from 100% fruit juice. The Academy of Pediatrics and American Heart Association recommend that 100% fruit juice intake be limited to 4-6 fl oz/day for children 1 to 6 years of age.

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1. Juice or fruit or vegetables are required as part of breakfast and snacks; fruits and/or vegetables (2 or more) are required for lunch and supper.
4. Age appropriate serving size is 2 fl oz for children 1-2 years, 4 fl oz for children 3-12 years.