



How to Do Offer Versus Serve (OVS)

OVS is an approach to menu planning and meal service that aims to simplify program administration and reduce food waste and costs while maintaining the nutritional value of the meal that is served.

The Basics

OVS allows children to decline some of the foods offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper. By offering food choices children are more likely to eat the food items they prefer rather than throw the food away.

OVS is an option for sponsors, not a requirement. All Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites, regardless of location or type of sponsorship, may choose to use OVS. SFSP school sponsors that decide to use the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns and Seamless Summer Option sponsors must follow the OVS requirements for NSLP and SBP.

All non-school sponsors and schools electing to follow the SFSP meal pattern that choose to use OVS must follow the requirements outlined below for the meal to be reimbursable. These requirements ensure that children are receiving enough food to meet their nutritional needs. Offering different food items supports and encourages the practice of offering a variety of food choices for children and increases the likelihood that children will select foods they prefer and reduce waste.

Terms to Know

- A food component is one of the food groups that comprise reimbursable breakfasts or reimbursable lunches and supper meals.
- A food item is a specific food offered within the food components comprising the reimbursable meal. For example, separate ½ cup servings of peaches and pears are two food items that comprise one component (fruit and vegetable component).
- A combination food contains more than one food item from different food components that cannot be separated. An example is cheese pizza which contains three food items from different food components: servings of a bread alternate (crust), a serving of vegetable (tomato sauce), and a serving of meat alternate (cheese). Other examples of combination foods are soups, prepared sandwiches and burritos.





OVS at Breakfast

Requirements

The meal pattern for breakfast consists of 3 food components:

- Fruit/vegetable
- Bread/bread alternate
- Milk

For OVS:

- All the required breakfast food components in the minimum required serving sizes must be offered through at least 4 different food items;
- The 4th food item offered can be a serving of a fruit/vegetable, bread/bread alternate, or meat/meat alternate
- All the food items must be different from each other; and
- A child must select at least 3 of the food items offered.

If two or more food items from one food component are offered (ex. toast and cereal from the bread/bread alternate component), site supervisors and children must know what choices make up a reimbursable breakfast through instructions and/or signage.

Examples of Breakfast Menus

There are a variety of ways to plan a menu that meets the OVS breakfast requirements. Here are a few examples.

Example 1: Menu offering 4 food items

- Muffin
- Cereal
- Banana
- Milk

Under OVS, a child can select the muffin, banana, and milk, OR the cereal, banana, and milk, OR the muffin, cereal and banana, OR the muffin, cereal, and milk for a reimbursable breakfast.





Example 2: Menu offering 5 food items with a choice of a combination food

- Waffle with fruit (combination food with 2 food items from 2 food components: waffle from the bread/bread alternate component; fruit from the fruit/vegetable component)*
- Slice of toast
- Orange slices
- Milk

A child may choose the waffle with fruit (combination food) and must take one other food item that is offered for a reimbursable breakfast. If a child declines the waffle with fruit, the child must take the toast, orange slices, and milk in order to make a reimbursable breakfast.

Example 3: Menu offering 6 food items with a food item choice within one component

- Slice of toast
- Cereal
- Fruit (offer all three of the following items to provide children with a choice):
 - Tomato juice
 - Pineapple chunks
 - Mixed berries
- Milk

A child may take the slice of toast, cereal, and tomato juice, OR slice of toast, pineapple chunks, and mixed berries, OR cereal, slice of toast, and milk, OR cereal, mixed berries, and milk and many other combinations for a reimbursable meal.

OVS at Lunch and Supper

Requirements

The meal pattern for lunch and supper consists of 4 food components:

- Fruit/vegetable (consists of two different food items)
- Bread/bread alternate
- Meat/meat alternate
- Milk

For OVS:

- All the required lunch components in the minimum required serving sizes must be offered through at least 5 different food items;
- All the food items must be different from each other; and
 - A child must take at least 3 food components.





Lunch and supper OVS requirements are different from breakfast OVS requirements. While a child must select 3 food items at breakfast, at lunch and supper a child must take 3 different food components. Three food components are required for an adequate nutritious meal for children.

Examples of menus

There are a variety of ways to plan a menu that meets the OVS lunch and supper requirements. Here are a few examples.

Example 1: Menu with 6 food items and a choice of a combination food

- Turkey sandwich with tomato slices (combination food with 3 food items from 3 food components: turkey slices from the meat/meat alternate component; sandwich bread from the bread/bread alternate component; tomato slices from the fruit/vegetable component)
- Crackers
- Green beans*
- Milk

A child may decline the combination food and would need to take the remaining 3 food items, which are from 3 food components (crackers from the bread/bread alternate component; green beans from the fruit/vegetable component; milk from the milk component), for it to be a reimbursable meal. The child could also choose just to take the sandwich and it would be a reimbursable meal because there are 3 food components in the sandwich.

*A child only needs to take one fruit or vegetable item (ex. the green beans) to count towards the entire fruit and vegetable component.

Example 2: Menu with 6 food items and a food item choice

- Meat/meat alternate (offering both of the following items provides a child with more choices and are able to select the one he or she prefers):
 - Yogurt
 - Roasted chicken
- Rice
- Broccoli*
- Apple slices*
- Milk

A child may select the chicken, rice, and broccoli, OR yogurt, apple slices, and milk, OR, chicken, broccoli, and milk, OR yogurt, rice, and broccoli, and many other combinations for a reimbursable meal. If a child selects yogurt, chicken, and rice it would not be a reimbursable meal because only 2 food components (yogurt and chicken from the meat/meat alternate component and rice from the bread/bread alternate component) were taken instead of the required 3.



*A child only needs to take one fruit or vegetable item (the broccoli OR the apple slices) to count towards the entire fruit and vegetable component.

Example 3: Menu with 7 food items and a choice of a combination food

- Pasta with marinara sauce (combination food with 2 food items from 2 food components: pasta from the bread/bread alternate component; marinara sauce from the fruit/vegetable component)
- Carrot and raisin salad (combination food with 2 food items from 1 food component: carrots and raisins from the fruit/vegetable component)
- Steamed peas
- Cheese sticks
- Milk

A child may choose the pasta with marinara sauce (combination food) and then must take at least one other food component that's offered, such as the cheese sticks (meat/meat alternate component) or the milk (milk component), for a reimbursable meal. If a child takes the carrot and raisin salad (combination food), he or she would also need to take at least two other food components, such as the cheese sticks (meat/meat alternate) or the milk (milk component). A child could not just take the two combination foods because there are only 2 food components offered in those 2 combination foods (pasta from the bread/bread alternate and marinara sauce, carrots, and raisins from the fruit/vegetable component). A child may also decline both combination foods and take the steamed peas (fruit/vegetable component), cheese sticks (meat/meat alternate component), and the milk (milk component) and it would be a reimbursable meal.

Offering Choices

Within each food component, different choices may be offered. This gives children the choice of many combinations for building a reimbursable meal. Offering a variety of food choices to children increases the likelihood that children will select foods and beverages they prefer which increases consumption and decreases food waste. However, it is important to know that offering a variety of choices within a *food item* is different from OVS.

For example, a breakfast menu that includes two types of cereals, a serving of fruit and a serving of milk is not a reimbursable meal under OVS. This is because only one grain item (cereal) is being offered to each child, even though the child can select from several cereal options. All food items offered must be different from each other. If the breakfast menu included two types of cereals, a serving of toast, a serving of fruit and a serving of milk, it would be a reimbursable meal. Additionally, a larger food item that is worth two servings, such as a 2oz muffin, counts as one food item under OVS, not two.

If choices of food items within a component are offered, the sponsor must show or tell children what choices or combinations the child may select to have a reimbursable meal. It is up to the sponsor to determine the variety





of foods offered and how much a student may select. Sponsors have the flexibility to offer more than the minimum requirements if they choose to.

Identifying Reimbursable Meals (signage, instructions, trainings)

Summer sites using OVS must identify what a child must select in order to have a reimbursable meal under OVS. Signage, menus, and verbal instructions should provide clear information about allowable choices. This will help students understand which foods may be declined and easily build a reimbursable meal. Summer sites are encouraged to host trainings for summer site staff so they can help children select a reimbursable meal.

USDA Resources:

Regulations and Policies

- **SFSP Regulations: Meal service requirements, 7 CFR 225.16**
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d87b1089e455f65409bd1dbf463b3686&node=pt7.4.225&rgn=div5#se7.4.225_116
- **Meal Service Requirements, SP 13-2015 (v.2), SFSP 05-2015 (v.2), *Summer Meal Programs Meal Service Requirements Revised Q&As- Revised*, January 12, 2015**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/summer-meal-programs-meal-service-requirements-qas-revised>

Handbooks and Other Tools

- **Administrative Guidance for Sponsors**
This guide provides useful information on how to operate a summer site, including OVS.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/AdminGuideSponsors.pdf>
- **Nutrition Guidance for Sponsors**
This handbook made just for sponsors includes nutrition and OVS tips.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NutritionGuide.pdf>
- **Innovative Strategies: Meal Service** <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/best-practices-meal-service>
- **Offer Versus Serve Guidance for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program in School Year 2014-2015**





This guide explains how to implement OVS when using the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program meal patterns.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP57-2014a.pdf>

Toolkit pages

- **How to Establish Meal Service Times**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-MealServiceTimes.pdf>
- **Family Style Meals: A New Way to Teach Healthy Eating Habits**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-FamilyStyleMeals.pdf>
- **Serving Adults: What You Need to Know**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-AdultMeals.pdf>
- **What to Do with Leftover Meals**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-LeftoverMeals.pdf>
- **Successfully Operating a Congregate Feeding Site**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-CongregateFeeding.pdf>

Additional Information

Sponsors and the general public should contact the appropriate State agency for additional guidance. State agencies should contact their FNS Regional Office for additional guidance.

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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