

GUIDELINES FOR SWEETS SERVED AT THE CONGREGATE NUTRITION SITE
CONGREGATE NUTRITION SERVICES
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING

Technical Assistance provided by
Eleanor D. Schlenker, Ph.D., R.D., VDA Consultant

Background Information

The Elderly Nutrition Program and the senior centers that cooperate with the congregate meals program strive to create an environment that is friendly, inviting, and supportive of physical, social and mental well-being. A strong sense of community among senior participants and between Area Agency on Aging programs and neighborhood businesses and organizations is vital to our mission. At the same time, we must be mindful of our responsibility to promote the highest possible level of nutrition, health, and fitness to those we serve.

Nutritional Considerations

In general, snacks consumed prior to the meal, even if good sources of nutrients, can interfere with the older person eating all of the noon meal. This may be especially detrimental for seniors for whom the congregate meal is their major source of nutrients for the day. It is not our intention to deprive senior participants of additional food or beverage items. Instead, alternatives to eating snacks immediately prior to the noon meal are recommended.

Participants Who Are Underweight

Eating extra servings of foods or beverages high in fat and sugar is not a healthy way to add calories to the diet, even for seniors who may be underweight and need to eat more food. Although sweets will add calories, these foods and drinks are not good sources of other important nutrients that are low in the diets of older people with low food intake. For frail or underweight older people who eat relatively little food and get full quickly, eating sweet baked items prior to the noon meal may mean that they cannot finish all of the food in their meal. This is especially detrimental if the congregate meal is the major source of nutrients for the day.

Participants Who Are Overweight or Trying to Maintain Weight

Eating many servings of foods or beverages high in sugar, fat and calories can be a problem for older people who are trying to avoid unwanted weight gain or who are already overweight. Being overweight increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Overweight also causes additional strain on the joints and can make walking difficult.

Suggested Guidelines

- The AAA or service provider will work with congregate site managers and participants to phase in these suggested guidelines at congregate nutrition sites.

- Alternatives and information will be provided to seniors who are diabetic or who should avoid sweets.

- Participants will be allowed to take snacks (that are not potentially hazardous food items) home to eat later, as an alternative to eating snacks and sweets immediately prior to the noon meal.
- No program money, including Nutrition Services Incentive Program reimbursement (previously USDA) and/or Title III C-1 funds, shall be spent on high fat, high sugar items (including beverages and desserts) served in addition to the noon meal.
- If snacks or beverages are needed to accommodate participants who arrive mid-morning or who remain at the meal site until mid-afternoon, more appropriate items may be provided.
- Donated items such as cakes, doughnuts, brownies, etc. will not be served more than 1 to 2 times per week at congregate nutrition sites. Snacks (if needed) provided on other days shall be more appropriate items.
- If snacks are available prior to the noon meal, participants will be encouraged to eat no more than one item prior to lunch. Remaining items can be taken home to eat later.
- Celebrations with birthday cake and other sweets should be limited to once a month.

Appropriate Alternative Food Items

- Check recipes for the amount of added sugar
- Items that increase sources of protein and calcium
- Muffins
- Snacks with cereal as a major ingredient (cereal based products)
- Pudding (check amount of sugar)
- Fruit
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Canned fruit in water
- Fruit juice (no sugar added)
- Unsweetened ice tea with sugar or sugar additive available
- Milk
- Water