



Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

Grandparents and Nutritional Needs

Serving Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Through the
Senior Nutrition Program

Introduction

Many participants in Older Americans Act (OAA) senior nutrition programs may be raising grandchildren without the parent in the home.

In the United States, there are more than 2.4 million grandparents who are head of the household. They are responsible for grandchildren living with them and help raise them as “grandfamilies.”

- 46% are ages 60 or older
- 45% have been caring for a grandchild for five or more years
- The rate of food insecurity for grandparent-headed households is more than 60% higher than the rate for all households with children

Nutritional Needs for Older Adults

Adults 60 and older have specific nutritional needs. They are at a greater risk of many chronic conditions and diseases and have increased needs for certain nutrients. Grandparents may concentrate on buying food that is appealing to the children in the household, but these food items may not meet their own nutritional needs. This can be especially concerning for families on a fixed income.

Following is a breakdown of key nutrients, their sources, and their role in supporting the health of older adults.

Nutrient	Benefits	Common sources
Protein	Maintains muscle and strength to decrease fall risks	Meat, beans, nuts, eggs, dairy
Potassium	Supports immune system and helps control blood pressure	Oranges, prune juice, melons, bananas, peaches, raisins, potatoes, squash, dark leafy greens, soybeans, carrots, corn, beans/lentils, red bell peppers
Calcium	Maintains bone health and prevents bone loss	Dairy, broccoli, dark leafy greens, almonds, tofu
Vitamin D	Maintains bone health and prevents bone loss	Sunlight, fish, dairy, liver
Fiber	Improves digestion and lessens constipation issues	Whole grains, fresh and lightly cooked produce
Vitamin B12	Supports the absorption of nutrients in the small intestine	Meat, dairy, eggs, whole grain cereals, fish, fortified soy & almond milk

Consuming enough water, through both foods and beverages, is also important, as older adults have a decreased sense of thirst, which may lead to dehydration.

Senior Nutrition Program

The Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) is our opportunity to help provide nutritious meals for adults 60 and older, as it adheres to the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary Reference Intakes. This ensures that meals served through the SNP provide the nutrients older adults need.

Remember, older adults will often give their meals away to those they care for and may not eat at all. So, our goal is to not only provide the meal, but ensure the older adult eats the meal.

Serving Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Inherent flexibilities within the Older Americans Act allow nutrition programs to provide services in different ways to meet the needs of the older adults in the community. Below are some things to consider.

- Make sure your policies are flexible enough to meet the needs of grandfamilies.
 - Do they accommodate a grandparent who may arrive to meals late or need to leave early?
 - Is your home-delivered meal policy limited to only people who are homebound? Can you expand the criteria?
- Do your policies allow grab-and-go, restaurant, or food truck models?
- Consider adjusting mealtimes to meet grandparents' needs.
 - Evening programs can provide meals after school.
 - Breakfast meals may be a good option for grandparents after they drop their grandchildren off at school.
- Consider providing meals that are appealing to both older adults and children (e.g., spaghetti and meatballs, tacos, sloppy joes).
- Refer grandparents to Information & Assistance to ensure they receive resources for caregiver programs and other services.
- Provide grandparents with nutrition education focused on meeting their own nutritional needs as well as the needs of the children they care for.
 - Nutrition education can highlight meeting each component of [MyPlate](#) to ensure that everyone in the family gets enough of each food group.
 - Limiting added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium is important for all age groups. The [Nutrition and Aging Resource Center](#) has more info.
- Consider intergenerational activities so grandparents can include their grandchildren. For example:
 - Consider setting up a voucher program with a local Summer Feeding Service Program (SFSP) to allow SNP participants to pick up a meal at a site with their grandchild. The SFSP could then send an invoice to the SNP provider for reimbursement. SFSP participants must consume the meal in a congregate setting. These meals could be counted as Title III-C1.

- Provide a pop-up SNP site at an SFSP meal site or work with SFSP providers to set up a location at the Senior Center to allow grandchildren and grandparents to eat together. Picnic tables could be provided outdoors.
- Offer Nutrition Counseling to grandparents. A registered dietitian can look at the whole picture – nutritional risk, health conditions, nutrition history, dietary intake, and medications – and make recommendations to help ensure the nutritional needs of the entire household are met.

Collaborating With Others

OAA programs can collaborate with other organizations to better meet the needs of grandparents and the grandchildren they're raising. Your first step is to call these organizations to find ways to work together to help grandfamilies.

- Schools (school food service director, youth services, family resource centers, counselors)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) organizations
- Department of Social Services
- [State Kinship Care Programs](#) funded by the Administration for Children and Families.

See the [Kin and Grandfamilies Resource List](#) for more resources.