

HOT TOPICS

in The Dietitian's Corner

Queries of the Quarter

by Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD

In the past few months I have received many queries about surviving in our ever-changing environment while budgets get tighter, costs increase, and standards get more stringent. Dealing with rising costs of dairy products and controlling the sodium content of our menus are on the top of the list!

Rising Dairy Costs

Increases in the price of dairy products are requiring all of us to take a look at our menus overall and consider cost-effective alternatives to meet nutrient needs. There is also concern whether use of these products will meet ACA and NCCHC Standards. Listserv discussion indicates some facilities/agencies aren't making any changes, while others are increasing the use of powdered milk to drink and in cooking; using fortified milk replacement beverages and/or using other nutrient fortified products.

Milk alternatives and fortified foods are becoming increasingly popular to supplement and/or replace liquid milk. Currently across North America, milk is served as often as three times daily in correctional institutions on main population menus; this varies based on individual governing agency requirements. When milk is estimated at .25 cents or more for the 90-120 calories it provides, this is approximately 1/2-1/3 the cost of a meal that is offering about 8-10 percent of the calories for that meal.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid recommend 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk, or equivalent milk products for ages nine and over. If one doesn't or can't consume milk, lactose-free milk products—such as soy milk and/or calcium-fortified foods and beverages—are recommended.

Milk and dairy products provide mainly Calcium, Vitamin D,

Controlling the amount of sodium in corrections menus is a balancing act of palatability vs. cost control.



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and protein (a good source at 8 gm/8 oz.) and are often fortified with Vitamin A. They also contribute Potassium and Phosphorus. A serving is:

- 8 oz. Milk
- 1-1/2 oz. Cheese
- 1 cup Yogurt
- 2 oz. Processed Cheese

Cost-Saving Alternatives

These products are available through our vendors who cater to our correctional needs.

Beverages

- Nonfat dry milk/skim milk powder—reconstituted for drinking and used in cooking.
- Milk replacements—specially formulated to have the appearance of milk and provide similar nutrients. Some are available sugar-free.
- Fortified drinks—specially formulated to resemble milk containing nutrients. May contain Calcium, Vitamin D, protein, and often other nutrients. Some are available sugar-free.

Fortified Foods

- Puddings and cheese sauces fortified with Calcium, Zinc, Vitamin C, and Vitamin D.
- Bread dough fortified with Calcium.

Although many of these items contain the same or similar vitamins and minerals as milk, the quantities of these nutrients vary. Some contain less or no protein, and may be lower in calories. This may or may not be an issue depending on your requirements. It is important to have your dietitians assess these nutrient differences when making product alterations.

Here are some replies from queries on this subject...

- Two eight ounce servings of 1% milk per day.
- Milk prices are \$.255 per carton. Currently, milk is served at breakfast and an additional milk alternative that provides the same nutrients as an 8 oz. glass of milk.

- 1 cup milk/day plus fortified beverage, tea, and cheese.
- Milk substitute, in individual plastic packets...and the inmates like it! It is served with the supper meal and the inmates make their own drink at the dorm.
- No menu changes made due to milk price increases.
- Three servings of milk per day per ... requirement change in 2005. Chips were removed from the menu when the third serving of milk was implemented to help cover some of the extra milk costs.
- All adult inmates get one serving of milk with breakfast coffee and cereal. We have not changed anything at this point.
- Single serve fortified drink mix with ... twice a day.
- No menu changes, as we have a dairy and don't pay an outrageous price for milk. We have found that it's more economical to use fluid milk in recipes now rather than non-fat dry milk.
- In Canada, there's been no significant increase in milk cost recently. Serve 250 ml milk + 250 ml enriched drink crystals per inmate/day. Use of other dairy products on the menu continues as usual, i.e. cheese, pudding, etc.
- In the process of changing one milk serving to a non-dairy milk alternative fortified drink mix to maintain budgets and nutrition.
- DOC is considering replacing one 8 oz. serving of milk on our statewide menu with the ... product due to the increasing cost of milk.

Meeting ACA and NCCHC Compliance Standards

This is a major concern if facilities are ACA and/or NCCHC accredited, or if policies indicate ACA or NCCHC compliance.

The ACA Standards for jails and prisons, 4th edition, do not address specific foods that can be served, but do acknowledge nutritionally adequate menus and meeting the dietary allowances.

The NCCHC in each of its 2003 jail, prison, and juvenile facility versions of *Standards for Health Services*, standard F-02 Nutrition and Medical Diets, intends that "...food served will help inmates be healthy." According to Judith Stanley, NCCHC's Director of Accreditation, the specifics of how this is accomplished is by incorporation of principles expressed by the various guidelines of the US Departments of Agriculture and Health & Human Services, including Recommended Dietary Allowances (Compliance Indicator #2).

She comments: "Certainly milk and dairy products would be the best practice recommendations; however, substitutes approved by nutritional experts as being nutritionally adequate would be acceptable from a compliance for accreditation standpoint. There may be certain populations—those on special medical diets or adolescents—that may be exceptions and such should be clearly spelled out by the combined medical director/dietitian-consultant's directives."

Sodium Content of Menus

Processed foods, particularly meats and entrees, are a major contributor to the sodium content of menus. Of course, these prod-

ucts are part of the balancing act to control costs as well. As with nutrient fortified foods and beverages, there are reduced sodium foods to accommodate our needs, thanks to some of our "corrections specific" vendors. Historically, these items have always been for health care/special diet needs.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend 2300 mg for healthy individuals (the content of approximately 1 tsp. salt). More than 25 years ago, a 2000 mg diet was considered a cardiac diet, and is still considered a restrictive diet for some health issues. Now, this level is close to the recommendation for most everyone. Corrections menus often are double this amount.

Following are some responses regarding the calorie and sodium content of main population menus...

- 2,800 average calories per day; sodium just under 3000 mg per day. No salt in cooking, specifications for low sodium canned vegetables, lowered sodium content in cold cuts/frankfurters (we have a manufacturer who makes them for us), etc.
- Regular menu 4800 mg of sodium for 2,500-2,600 calories. I plan to check out products like lunch meats or frozen entrees that have lower sodium content. The products should be comparable in protein content and cost to the ones we currently use in our menu.
- 4000 mg sodium; 2,700 calories. No added salt in any foods produced onsite.
- Average 3,100-3,200 calories per day and 4000-4100 mg per day of sodium. I will soon be encouraging our department to decide on the degree of healthiness they would like our menu goal to be, and that will determine the menu changes we make in the future.

Once again, we strive to meet nutrient guidelines providing sufficient calories with a palatable menu in a cost-effective manner. In summary, our challenges to improvise and meet needs continue. This process has been made easier, thanks to contributions from our vendors!

Other queries this quarter included Kosher Vendors, Herbal Teas Sold in Commissaries, and Halal Meats. For further information, contact me at bwakeen@neo.rr.com.

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Announcements

- Past Dietitian's Corner articles are available on the ACFSA website—www.acfsa.org.
- If you would like to be added to the Dietitians in Corrections networking EML (electronic mailing list), please email me directly at bwakeen@neo.rr.com. You *do not* have to be a dietitian. This is an informal discussion group and your name/email address will be listed in each email sent to the group.