



Menu Planning

GOAL: To improve the health of children by providing nutritious meals

When planning a menu, always consider the following:	
Meal Pattern	Follow Child & Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP) meal pattern to determine serving sizes and the number of food components required per meal or snack (see Meal Pattern Chart at www.childcare.mt.gov).
Variety	Offer a variety of different foods as it's important for children to try new foods. For example, try to avoid offering meals containing ground beef many times per week.
Meal Appearance	Consider meal appearance by incorporating a variety of colors, flavors, textures, shapes, and sizes when planning a meal.
Production	Plan the time required to produce a meal/snack and make sure it's manageable. If an entrée is difficult or time consuming to prepare, then make sure all other items with that meal are very easy and quick to prepare.
Purchasing	Confirm that all ingredients can be purchased easily and that they're cost effective.
Equipment	Plan your menu based on the equipment and dishware you possess. You may be limited by the equipment and dishware in your kitchen and you may need to adapt. Sometimes you can adapt the recipes to fit your needs, but other times you cannot and a recipe is not feasible due to lack of equipment or dishware.
Seasonal menus	Develop a seasonal cycle menu to take advantage of the fresh fruits and vegetables available during the summer months.

Tips for menu planning:

- Always offer milk at every meal. *Suggestion: Include milk with snacks even if it's not counted as a food component.*
- Offer water when milk is not offered. Juice is not recommended.
- Offer fresh fruits and vegetables instead of canned/frozen when they're in season and it's cost effective.
- Offer whole grains whenever possible (i.e. breads, crackers, cereals, rice, pasta).
- Offer beans, legumes, fruits and vegetables more often.
- Prepare homemade foods using fresh ingredients or ingredients that have been minimally processed.

Highly processed foods to avoid include:

- fish sticks and chicken nuggets
- sugary breakfast cereals and boxed meal mixes (i.e. Macaroni and Cheese, Rice A Roni)
- processed meats (i.e. cold cuts, sausages, ham, bacon, chicken nuggets, hot dogs, bologna)
- packaged cakes, cookies, and high-calorie snack foods (i.e. chips and cheese snacks)
- canned foods with lots of sodium and high-fat convenience foods (such as cans of ravioli)
- white breads and pastas made with refined white flour

Visit the CACFP website at www.childcare.mt.gov for a sample 20-day menu and more information on processed foods.

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