



Smart Meal Planning

Why plan meals?

Meal planning can save you time and money. It prevents food waste and reduces mealtime stress. Planning ahead lets you spend more time with the children in your care and less time worrying about what the next meal should be.

Where to start?

1. **Calculate your food budget.** Look at past receipts, the number of children in your care, food program reimbursement, and your expenses to calculate your food budget.
2. **Plan meals for the week.** Use the "Nutrition Best Practices" and "Meal Planning Chart" sections of this handout to guide your food choices and meal planning.
3. **Make a shopping list.** Look at what foods you already have in your refrigerator, freezer, and pantry. Then, figure out which foods you need to buy and add them to your list.
4. **Prep for the week.** Cutting up produce or making freezer meals when you have free time can make weekdays much smoother.
5. **Keep a well-stocked pantry.** Having a full pantry can make meal planning much easier. Great items to have on hand include: whole wheat pasta, oatmeal, canned beans, canned tuna, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables (without added sugar), nuts, and spices.

Nutrition Best Practices

Vegetables/Fruits

- Serve a variety of vegetables including dark green vegetables, red/orange vegetables and legumes at least one time per week.
- Serve juice no more than one time per day.



Grains/Breads



- Look for 100% whole grains at the store.
- Serve whole grains at least one time per day or as many as possible. The more the better!
- Serve cereals with six grams of sugar or less.

Meat/Meat Alternates

- Serve only lean meats and meat alternates.
- Limit processed meats such as hot dogs and chicken nuggets to once per week or less.



Fluid Milk

- Serve plain milk instead of flavored milk.
- Serve non-fat (skim) milk or low-fat (1%) milk to children two years and older.

Other

- Limit desserts and other sweet treats to one time per week.
- Limit fried and pre-fried foods.



Meal Planning Chart

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast 1. Vegetables/ Fruits 2. Grains 3. Fluid Milk					
Lunch/Dinner 1. Vegetables/ Fruits 2. Grains 3. Meat/Meat Alternates 4. Fluid Milk					
Snacks Pick two groups: 1. Vegetables/ Fruits 2. Grains 3. Meat/Meat Alternates 4. Fluid Milk					

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