



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

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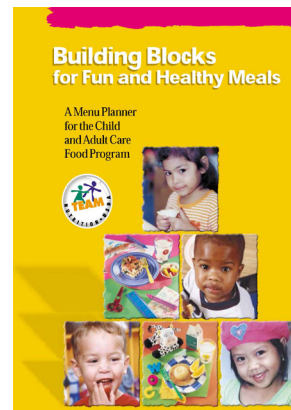


## Menu Planning for Healthy Eating

It's menu planning time! Menu planning is the foundation for healthy eating in child care settings. When you have carefully planned menus that emphasize variety and are filled with healthy and appealing foods, children are more likely to try these foods. In addition, planning menus provide opportunities to save money, reduce stress, and adapt menus to meet food allergies. Based on these benefits, menu planning is a winning strategy for both child care

professionals and the children in their care.

As you continue to strive towards your nutrition goals for the new year, keep in mind "The ABC's of Successful Menu Planning" covered in *Building Blocks for Fun and Healthy Meals* from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service. "The ABC's of Successful Menu Planning" offers these five basic tips: strive for balance, emphasize variety, add contrast, think about color, and consider eye appeal.



### Strive for Balance

It is important to strive for balance when planning meals. To achieve a winning combination of tastes and flavors that appeal to children, try using mild-flavored foods along with spicy or stronger-flavored foods. Focus on the nutrient content in meals, and balance higher fat foods with ones that have a lower fat content. For example, serve grilled cheese sandwiches with a side of carrots and kiwi slices. This menu offers a balance between sweet, mild flavors and strong flavors.

## Emphasize Variety

To help achieve a healthy diet, plan and serve a variety of foods from different food groups in a way that is appealing to children. For example, if you serve spaghetti and meatballs on Monday, avoid serving pasta on Tuesday. Mix up the way food items are prepared. Vegetables, for example, can be served raw, cooked, or seasoned. In addition, use a variety of different cooking methods to prepare main dishes, such as baking, roasting, stir-frying, or steaming as a means of emphasizing variety.



## Add Contrast

Adding contrast of textures, flavors, and preparation techniques to your menus will enhance the taste and appearance of the food items. Textures, such as crunchy, crispy, flaky, smooth, and creamy, are just a few of the many textures that add contrast to the meal. For example, when serving rice, offer a raw vegetable or crunchy salad to mix up the texture of the food items in the meal. Just like textures, the possibilities of flavors are endless, as you can blend herbs and spices to create sweet, sour, and even pungent flavors. As you add flavors and textures, remember to plan menus that are safe for the children in your care to eat.

## Think about Color

To create colorful meals, plan menus with at least three colors to achieve a more appealing menu. Combine colorful foods with foods that have little or no color. One easy way to make a colorful menu is to use colorful fruits and vegetables as side dishes to entrees with very limited colors, such as adding strawberries to oatmeal. In addition, a sprinkle of paprika or cinnamon provides instant color and flavor to bland food, providing a mix of colors, textures, and flavors. As a garnish or side dish, green or red bell pepper slices on a plate of mashed potatoes and oven-baked chicken will add a contrast of both color and texture. Always remember, anytime garnishment is used, it should complement the flavor of the food.

## Consider Eye Appeal

As you prepare meals, consider the way foods look in the serving bowl and how they may be arranged on the plate. This is especially important as children serve themselves through family-style meal service. Some children may immediately decide they will not eat certain foods if it is not presented in an appealing manner. Children may reject certain foods for a variety of reasons, including being over- or under-cooked, all being the same color, being too large for children's hands, or being undefinable.

## Special Considerations

When applying these basic menu planning principles, keep in mind other factors, such as regional food preferences, holidays or special occasions, climate and seasons, food allergies, and product availability. These factors can help you plan menus based on your facility's needs and products available to your child care program. Next, introduce new foods one at a time and remember, children will not always like the new food the first time it is served; it can take up to 15 times before children try and/or like a new food. Lastly, when planning a menu, always plan and prepare enough food to meet the Child and Adult Care Food Program meal patterns.



## Recipe of the Month

### Yogurt Fruit Dip

Are you looking for a healthy dip you can serve with fruit? The *USDA Recipe for Child Care* “Yogurt Fruit Dip” may be just what you looking for. This recipe is quick, easy to prepare, and very tasty.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 qt & 2 ¼ cups low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1 qt & 2 ¼ cups fresh or canned peaches

#### Directions:

1. Place the vanilla yogurt in a bowl.
2. Add the peaches to the yogurt, and stir to blend.
3. Place in refrigerator to chill.
4. Serve!

For additional crediting information, check out this recipe at [http://www.nfsmi.org/USDA\\_recipes/cc\\_recipes/G-04.pdf](http://www.nfsmi.org/USDA_recipes/cc_recipes/G-04.pdf). In addition, you can find other recipes on the USDA Recipes page of the NFSMI website: <http://www.nfsmi.org/Recipes>.

Yield: 25 servings

## Nutrition Fact

Did you know it is impossible to survive without water for more than a week? Half of the human body is made up of water; 75% of our muscle tissue and about 10% of our fat tissue is composed of it. Daily consumption of water is essential because water maintains normal body temperature, lubricates joints, excretes waste from the body, and protects sensitive tissues, such as the spinal cord. Water also helps maintain body weight and can safely boost energy levels.

To avoid dehydration, it is important to ensure you consume water as you are losing water. Your body loses water simply through exhaling. More water is lost when exercising or in high temperature environments. Proper hydration can be achieved through drinking water or other beverages or by eating foods containing water, such as fruits and vegetables. However, the best way to consume water is by drinking a cool glass of water.



# Vegetable of the Month: Sweet Potato



Sweet potatoes, which are vegetables from North America, Asia, and Africa, are edible, tuberous roots of vining plants that are easily grown but take about four months of warm weather to harvest. Often referred to as a “yam,” sweet potatoes are actually an entirely different plant, related to the morning glory flowers. Commonly, sweet potatoes are associated with the color orange, but they can be white, yellow, and purple, too. When selecting a sweet potato, choose small- to medium-sized, firm potatoes with smooth skin, free of cracks, soft spots, or blemishes.

Sweet potatoes are both nutrient-dense and rich in vitamins and minerals, including iron, calcium, potassium, and vitamins A, C, and B6. This vegetable is fat-free, cholesterol-free, and low in sodium, and it is a great source of dietary fiber. Try introducing this nutrient-dense vegetable to children in a fun way! Plant sweet potatoes with children in your facility over the summer, and watch them grow to get kids excited about trying the new vegetable.

## References

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