



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

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## Ways to Cut Food Cost

Purchasing nutritious food items on a budget can require many strategies, such as shopping in season, buying storable foods in larger quantities, and using coupons. However, not all strategies will work for all child care types. For example, as a means of curbing food cost, some child care programs may prefer to purchase food items in bulk, while other child care programs may prefer to use coupons. Ultimately, the key to curbing food cost is identifying which strategy works best for your child care program. For that reason, explore different methods, such as those mentioned in this memo, to help you identify the best way(s) for curbing your food cost.



Also, resist impulse purchases by only selecting the items on your shopping list. Use newspaper ads each week to find the best deals on foods. Ask for a rain check if an item on your shopping list has sold out. Keep the rain check information with your shopping list and use during the next visit to the store.

**Vary the Protein.** Plan meals and include a variety of choices from protein foods. Not only is this a good idea nutrition-wise, but it also helps save money. For example, serve beans and legumes frequently to help curb food cost. Additionally, beans and legumes are lower in fat and higher in fiber. Visit [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) for additional ways to vary your protein.

**Clip coupons.** Clip coupons for items you regularly use. Compare prices to be sure the item is less expensive with

**Make a list, and stick to it.** Use your shopping list to keep food costs low.

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## Ways to Cut Food Cost

the coupon. Often a store brand will be less expensive than a national brand with a discount. Try to use coupons when an item is on sale for bigger savings. If a coupon requires buying more than you will use, the waste is not a cost saver.



**Keep a cooler handy.** Avoid wilted produce, semi-thawed frozen foods, and milk that has warmed when shopping during the summer months. Keep these foods cold to assure full shelf-life and quality. During hot weather, place a cooler in the car before going to the store. Place frozen and fresh foods in the cooler with ice to keep cold in a hot car. Consider a collapsible cooler bag for convenience and conserving storage space. Plan errands and shop for food last, just before returning home.

**Be aware of bulk bins.** Look for bulk bins of whole grains, spices, and other items. Bulk bins are self-serve containers offered by some food stores. Bulk bins allow buying smaller amounts of food; this provides great opportunities to try small amounts of new foods, such as bulgur or quinoa. Compare the prices to the same foods in packages in the store to see if items purchased in bulk are ideal for your child care setting.

**Buy in season.** Produce in season tastes wonderful and is usually lower in price. Fresh fruits and vegetables make these foods nutritious bargains. Check out locally grown items at the farmers' market or local produce stand. Planning a field trip to a 'you-pick' farm or garden can be a nutrition education activity and can also save on food costs.

In conclusion, there are numerous ways to stay within your food budget while providing nutritious meals to young children. Ultimately, the key is to identify what works for you and perfect this method while purchasing food items for your child care program.

## Vegetable of the Month: Kale

Kale is a green leafy vegetable that grows in many colors, including green, white, purple, or blueish green. It is in the same plant family as collards, brussels sprouts, and cabbage. This leafy vegetable is a nutrient-dense food, providing vitamins A, C, and K, and many minerals, including potassium, thus yielding very few calories.

Temperatures can affect how kale plants taste. For example, in hot temperatures, such as during the summer months, kale can have a bitter taste. However, if it is harvested after the first frost, it is often sweeter because some of the plant starches change to sugars. In addition, smaller leaves and bunches are usually tender and less strong in flavor.

There are numerous ways to enjoy kale, such as:

- Cooked, finely chopped, and tossed with pasta
- Blended in a smoothie
- Chopped and added to soups and stews
- Tossed in salad
- Baked into a chip







## Recipe of the Month

### Kale Chips

The first Wednesday of October is National Kale Day. This annual event celebrates eating, growing, and sharing kale throughout the country. Give this recipe a try!

#### Ingredients:

- 1 bunch kale (tough stems removed, leaves torn into pieces, about 16 cups)
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

#### Directions:

1. Position racks in upper third and center of oven, preheat to 375 °F.
2. If kale is wet, vigorously shake the kale to reduce water, and then, transfer to a large bowl.
3. Drizzle the kale with oil, and sprinkle with salt. Evenly coat kale with oil and salt.
4. Fill two large rimmed baking sheets with a layer of kale, making sure the leaves don't overlap. (If the kale won't all fit, make the chips in batches.)
5. Bake for 8-12 minutes until most leaves are crisp, switching the pans back to front and top to bottom halfway through, 8-12 minutes total. (If baking a batch on just one sheet, start checking after 8 minutes to prevent burning.)

**Yield:** 4 Servings

**Make Ahead Tip:** Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to two days.

## Nutrient Density

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* encourage meals based on nutrient dense foods because they have relatively few calories and provide vitamins, minerals, and other substances that may have positive health effects. Nutrient-dense foods do not have extra calories from added fats or sugars. Most are minimally-processed choices from each of the five food groups. Here are some examples of nutrient dense foods from each food group of *MyPlate*:

- Dairy: Low-fat or fat-free milk and milk products
- Fruits: Fresh, frozen, or canned in light syrup/juice/water, dried
- Vegetables: Fresh, frozen, canned with less salt, dried
- Grains: Whole grain or whole grain-rich (half or more of product is whole grain) bread, cereal and pasta, oatmeal, brown rice
- Protein Foods: Dry beans and peas, eggs, fresh or frozen lean beef, poultry, and pork, seafood, unsalted nuts and seeds

When preparing meals with these foods, look for recipes with little-added fat and sugar to keep the nutrient levels high and calories low. Foods in the CACFP meal pattern include nutrient dense foods, which help children be healthy and grow.



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