



MENU PLANNING BASICS

A GUIDE FOR CACFP OPERATORS IN CHILD CARE



Institute of Child Nutrition

The University of Mississippi

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Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

VISION

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

MISSION

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Menu planning is one of the most important steps for successfully managing the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The menu influences all aspects of the food service operation — from food purchasing to meal preparation. What's more, a carefully planned menu can save time and money while providing balance and variety. Therefore, following good menu planning practices is essential for offering young children nutritious and appealing meals and snacks.

This menu planning guide offers some basic information for planning nutritious menus that align with the CACFP. You may find it useful for:

- learning more about the meal pattern requirements,
- discovering good practices for planning meals and snacks, and
- getting ideas for preparing nutritious and appealing dishes.

It also features the following menu planning tools:

- Sample menu
- Shopping list
- Recipes
- Menu planning template
- Tip sheets

Remember, this resource is simply a guide; you may need to adjust some recommendations to meet the needs of your program. Most importantly, always follow local or state regulatory requirements.





CACFP MEAL PATTERNS

What is a CACFP meal pattern? A meal pattern is a nutritional standard for a specific age group. It features a set of meal components, types of food, and the minimum serving sizes required for meals (breakfast, lunch, or supper) and snacks.

What are the meal components?

There are five meal components:

- Fluid Milk
- Meats/Meat Alternates
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Grains

What are the specific age groups for infants and children?

The age groups reflect the varying nutritional needs of children. To meet their needs and the program's requirements, select the correct meal pattern for the age group (or groups) of children in your care.

The CACFP meal pattern for infants is divided into two age groups:

- Birth through 5 months
- 6 months through 11 months

The CACFP meal pattern for children in child care features four age groups:

- Ages 1 through 2 years
- Ages 3 through 5 years
- Ages 6 through 12 years
- Ages 13 through 18 years

Do the CACFP meal patterns have minimum or maximum requirements?

Each meal pattern lists minimum serving sizes for each meal component. To meet the CACFP requirements, serve at least the minimum amount for a reimbursable meal. Older children may need larger servings to satisfy their nutritional needs.

CACFP

MEAL PATTERN REQUIREMENTS

INFANTS

Encourage and Support Breastfeeding

- Providers may receive reimbursement for meals when a breastfeeding mother comes to the child care center or family child care home and directly breastfeeds her infant.
- Only breastmilk and infant formula are served to infants 0 through 5 month olds.

Developmentally Appropriate Meals

- There are two age groups, 0 through 5 month olds and 6 through 11 month olds.
- Solid foods are gradually introduced around 6 months of age, as developmentally appropriate.

More Nutritious Meals

- At snack, a vegetable or fruit, or both is required for infants 6 through 11 months (as developmentally appropriate).
- Juice, cheese food, or cheese spread are not allowed for infant meals or snacks.
- Ready-to-eat cereals are creditable at snack for infants.
- Whole eggs credit as a meat/meat alternate for infant meals and snacks.

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CHILDREN

Greater Variety of Vegetables and Fruits

- The fruits and vegetables components are a combined component at breakfast and are separate components at lunch, supper, and snack.
- Juice is limited to once per day.

More Whole Grains

- At least one serving of grains per day must be whole grain-rich (grain content is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain, with any remaining grains being enriched).
- Grain-based desserts do not count towards the grains component.
- Ounce equivalents (oz eq) are used to determine the amount of creditable grains.

More Protein Options

- Meats and meat alternates may be served in place of the entire grains component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week.
- Tofu credits as a meat alternate.

Age-Appropriate Meals

- Larger portion sizes than specified in the meal pattern charts may need to be served to children 13 through 18 years old to meet their nutritional needs.

Less Added Sugar

- Yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce).
- Breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.

Making Every Sip Count

- Serve unflavored whole milk to 1-year-olds, unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk to children 2 through 5-year-olds, and low-fat or fat-free flavored or unflavored milk to children 6-year-olds and older (only).
- Non-dairy milk substitutes that are nutritionally equivalent to milk may be served in place of cow's milk to children with medical or special dietary needs without a medical statement.

Additional Improvements

- Offer Versus Serve extends to at-risk afterschool programs.
- Deep-fat frying (submerged in oil) is not allowed

Infant Meal Pattern*	
Birth through 5 Months	6 through 11 Months
Breakfast	
4-6 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ²	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ² ; and 0 to ½ ounce equivalent infant cereal; ² or 0-4 tablespoons meat, fish, poultry, whole egg, cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils; or 0-2 ounces of cheese; or 0-4 ounces (volume) of cottage cheese; or 0-4 ounces or ½ cup of yogurt; ³ or 0-4 tablespoons (¼ cup) or 2.2 ounces tofu ⁴ ; or a combination of the above; ⁵ and 0-2 tablespoons vegetable or fruit, or a combination of both ^{5,6}
Lunch or Supper	
4-6 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ²	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ² ; and 0 to ½ ounce equivalent infant cereal; ² or 0-4 tablespoons meat fish, poultry, whole egg, cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils; or 0-2 ounces of cheese; or 0-4 ounces (volume) of cottage cheese; or 0-4 ounces or ½ cup of yogurt; ³ or 0-4 tablespoons (¼ cup) or 2.2 ounces tofu ⁴ ; or a combination of the above; ⁵ and 0-2 tablespoons vegetable or fruit, or a combination of both. ^{5,6}
Snack	
4-6 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ²	2-4 fluid ounces breast milk ¹ or formula ² ; and 0-½ ounce equivalent bread or bread-like items; ³ or 0-¼ ounce equivalent crackers; ³ or 0-½ ounce equivalent infant cereal; ^{2,3} or 0-¼ ounce equivalent ready-to-eat breakfast cereal; ^{3,4,5} and 0-2 tablespoons vegetable or fruit or a combination of both ^{4,6}

See footnotes on page 6

Infant Meal Pattern Footnotes

Breakfast, Lunch and Supper

- ¹ Breast milk or formula, or portions of both, must be served; however, it is recommended that breast milk be served in place of formula from birth through 11 months. For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum amount of breast milk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breast milk may be offered, with additional breast milk offered at a later time if the infant will consume more.
- ² Infant formula and dry infant cereal must be iron-fortified.
- ³ Yogurt may be regular or soy, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened. Through September 30, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces. By October 1, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce).
- ⁴ The minimum serving amount of commercially prepared tofu for infants 6 through 11 months must contain at least 5 grams of protein.
- ⁵ A serving of this component is required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.
- ⁶ Fruit and vegetable juices must not be served.

Snack

- ¹ Breast milk or formula, or portions of both, must be served; however, it is recommended that breast milk be served from birth through 11 months. For some breastfed infants who regularly consume less than the minimum amount of breast milk per feeding, a serving of less than the minimum amount of breast milk may be offered, with additional breast milk offered at a later time if the infant will consume more.
- ² Infant formula and dry infant cereal must be iron-fortified.
- ³ A serving of grains must be whole grain-rich, enriched meal, enriched flour, bran, or germ.
- ⁴ A serving of this component is required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.
- ⁵ Through September 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce. By October 1, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.
- ⁶ Fruit and vegetable juices must not be served.

Child Meal Pattern				
Meal Components and Food Items ¹	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-5	Ages 6-12	Ages 13-18 ²
Breakfast				
Fluid Milk	4 fluid ounces ³	6 fluid ounces ⁴	8 fluid ounces ⁵	8 fluid ounces ⁵
Vegetables, fruits, or portions of both⁶	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Grains⁷ (ounce equivalent = oz eq)				
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread products, such as biscuits, rolls, or muffins	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cooked breakfast cereal, cereal grains, or pasta	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified ready-to-eat cereal (dry, cold)				
Flakes or rounds	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup
Puffed cereal	¾ cup	¾ cup	1 ¼ cup	1 ¼ cup
Granola	⅞ cup	⅞ cup	1 cup	1 cup
¹ Must serve all three components for a reimbursable meal. Offer versus serve is an option for at-risk afterschool care centers. ² At-risk afterschool programs and emergency shelters may need to serve larger portions to children ages 13 through 18 to meet their nutritional needs. ³ Must be unflavored whole milk for children age 1. ⁴ Must serve unflavored milk to children 2 through 5 years old. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁵ May serve unflavored or flavored milk to children ages 6 and older. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁶ Juice must be pasteurized. Full-strength juice may only be offered to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal or snack, per day. ⁷ Must serve at least one whole grain-rich serving, across all eating occasions, per day. Grain-based desserts may not be used to meet the grains requirement. Meats/meat alternates may be offered in place of the entire grains requirement, up to 3 times per week at breakfast. One ounce equivalent of meats/meat alternates credits equal to one ounce equivalent of grains. Through September 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce. By October 1, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.				

Child Meal Pattern				
Meal Components and Food Items ¹	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-5	Ages 6-12	Ages 13-18 ²
Lunch and Supper				
Fluid Milk	4 fluid ounces ³	6 fluid ounces ⁴	8 fluid ounces ⁵	8 fluid ounces ⁵
Meats/Meat Alternates (ounce equivalent = oz eq)				
Lean meat, poultry, or fish	1 oz eq	1 ½ oz eq	2 oz eq	2 oz eq
Tofu, soy products, or alternate protein products ⁶	1 oz eq	1 ½ oz eq	2 oz eq	2 oz eq
Cheese	1 oz eq	1 ½ oz eq	2 oz eq	2 oz eq
Large egg	½	¾	1	1
Beans, peas, and lentils	¼ cup	⅜ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Yogurt ⁷	4 oz eq (½ cup)	6 oz eq (¾ cup)	8 oz eq (1 cup)	8 oz eq (1 cup)
Peanut butter, soy nut butter, or other nut or seed butters	2 tbsp	3 tbsp	4 tbsp	4 tbsp
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq	2 oz eq
Vegetables⁸	⅛ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Fruits⁸	⅛ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
Grains⁹				
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread products, such as biscuits, rolls, or muffins	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cooked breakfast cereal, cereal grains, or pasta	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup
¹ Must serve all five components for a reimbursable meal. Offer versus serve is an option for at-risk afterschool care centers. ² At-risk afterschool programs and emergency shelters may need to serve larger portions to children ages 13 through 18 to meet their nutritional needs. ³ Must serve unflavored whole milk to children age 1. ⁴ Must serve unflavored milk to children 2 through 5 years old. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁵ May serve unflavored or flavored milk to children ages 6 and older. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁶ Alternate protein products must meet the requirements in Appendix A to Part 226. ⁷ Yogurt may be regular or soy, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened. Through September 30, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces. By October 1, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce). ⁸ Juice must be pasteurized. Full-strength juice may only be offered to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal or snack, per day. A vegetable may be offered to meet the entire fruit requirement. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served. ⁹ Must serve at least one whole grain-rich serving, across all eating occasions, per day. Grain-based desserts may not be used to meet the grains requirement. Through September 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce. By October 1, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.				

Child Meal Pattern				
Meal Components and Food Items ¹	Ages 1-2	Ages 3-5	Ages 6-12	Ages 13-18 ²
Snack				
Fluid Milk³	4 fluid ounces ³	4 fluid ounces ⁴	8 fluid ounces ⁵	8 fluid ounces ⁵
Meats/Meat Alternates (ounce equivalent = oz eq)				
Lean meat, poultry, or fish	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Tofu, soy products, or alternate protein products ⁶	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Cheese	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Large egg	½	½	½	½
Beans, peas, and lentils	⅛ cup	⅛ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
Yogurt ⁷	2 oz eq (¼ cup)	2 oz eq (¼ cup)	4 oz eq (½ cup)	4 oz eq (½ cup)
Peanut butter, soy nut butter, or other nut or seed butters	1 tbsp	1 tbsp	2 tbsp	2 tbsp
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds	½ ounce	½ ounce	1 ounce	1 ounce
Vegetables⁸	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup
Fruits⁸	½ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup
Grains⁹				
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich or enriched bread products, such as biscuits, rolls, or muffins	½ oz eq	½ oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq
Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cooked breakfast cereal, cereal grains, or pasta	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (dry, cold)				
Flakes or rounds	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup
Puffed cereal	¾ cup	¾ cup	1 ¼ cup	1 ¼ cup
Granola	⅛ cup	⅛ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
¹ Must serve two of the five components for a reimbursable snack. Milk and juice may not be served as the only two items in a reimbursable snack. ² At-risk afterschool programs and emergency shelters may need to serve larger portions to children ages 13 through 18 to meet their nutritional needs. ³ Must serve unflavored whole milk to children age 1. ⁴ Must serve unflavored milk to children 2 through 5 years old. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁵ May serve unflavored or flavored milk to children ages 6 and older. The milk must be fat-free, skim, low-fat, or 1 percent or less. ⁶ Alternate protein products must meet the requirements in Appendix A to Part 226. ⁷ Yogurt may be regular or soy, plain or flavored unsweetened or sweetened. Through September 30, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces. By October 1, 2025, yogurt must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce). ⁸ Juice must be pasteurized. Full-strength juice may only be offered to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal or snack, per day. ⁹ Must serve at least one whole grain-rich serving, across all eating occasions, per day. Grain-based desserts may not be used to meet the grains requirement. Through September 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce. By October 1, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.				





MENU PLANNING PRINCIPLES

With a wide variety of foods available in today's supermarket, it can be a challenge to select the most nutritious foods for young children. Where do you begin?

The following six menu planning principles, described in this section, provide a great starting point.

- Focus on good nutrition
- Strive for balance
- Emphasize variety
- Add contrast
- Think about color
- Consider eye appeal

Keep them in mind when planning menus based on the meal pattern requirements and the nutritional needs of the children in your care.

principle 1

Focus on Good Nutrition

Presenting a variety of nutritious foods helps introduce children to a wide range of tastes as well as nutrients.

Include a variety of whole grains

- Whole grains are good sources of fiber, B vitamins, and other essential nutrients. Eating a variety of whole grains can help to reduce the risk of obesity, as well as other chronic illnesses. One way to include a variety of whole grains is to replace all breads and breakfast cereals with whole grain versions.

Provide more whole fruits and vegetables than juice

- Juice contains vitamins and minerals, but it does not contain the fiber found in whole fruits and vegetables. Fiber promotes a good digestive system, and it helps children and adults feel fuller longer. One way to serve more whole fruits and vegetables is to limit juice to once per day.

Reduce processed foods on the menus

- Using fewer processed foods will limit saturated fat, salt, and sugar. One way to reduce processed foods is to prepare recipes from scratch instead of purchasing convenience foods. Another way is to use healthier fats, such as olive oil instead of butter, or herbs and spices instead of salt and sugar.

Try dried beans, peas, and lentils for protein

- Legumes are nutritious, inexpensive, and creditable as either a vegetable or a meat alternate in the CACFP meal patterns. They are great sources of protein, iron, zinc, folate, and fiber. One way to incorporate more legumes is to regularly replace meats with beans, such as a burrito with black beans.





principle 2

Strive for Balance

As you plan nutritious, appealing, and tasty menus, strive for balance in each meal and snack.

Balance flavors in appealing ways

- Too many mildly or strongly flavored foods may make a meal unappealing to young children. For example, a lunch menu with baked lemon-pepper chicken, spicy red potatoes, coleslaw, and milk may have too many spicy and strong flavors. A more balanced menu may include a garden salad, sliced strawberries, whole wheat roll, baked lemon-pepper chicken, and milk.

Use herbs and spices to balance flavors

- Herbs and spices are perfect for enhancing and adding flavor as well as balancing the taste of strong and mild flavors. For example, cinnamon, fennel, and nutmeg provides a sweet flavor; while bay leaves, cumin, and marjoram provides a spicy flavor.

Balance high-fat with low-fat foods

- Choose low-fat foods more often than those high in saturated fat, such as pizza, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets.
- Use low-fat side dishes to balance a main dish with higher fat content. For example, when the main dish is a grilled cheese sandwich, a food that is typically higher in fat, serve it with carrots and celery sticks to balance this meal.

principle 3

Emphasize Variety

Serving a variety of foods is important because no one food or group of foods provide the necessary nutrients for healthy growth and development. Variety also makes menus interesting and appealing to young children.

Include a wide variety of foods from day to day

- Offer a variety of foods in different forms and combinations throughout the week. This practice reduces the chance of serving the same foods on consecutive days, such as meatballs with spaghetti on Monday and meat lasagna on Tuesday. Serving similar foods too often can make for an unappealing menu.

Vary the types of main entrees (dishes) you serve

- Choose a variety of proteins for the main entree, such as lean meats, poultry, fish, and legumes. Another way to add variety to the main dish is to add whole grains and vegetables. For example, add yellow and red peppers to sweet and sour chicken over brown rice.

Include different forms of food and prepare them in a variety of ways

- Serve the same fruits and vegetables in both raw forms and cooked forms. Also, increase the variety of flavors on the menus by adding different seasonings. For example, carrots taste great when served raw, roasted with parsley and thyme, or sautéed with olive oil and cinnamon.

Include a small amount of new or unfamiliar food periodically

- Introduce one new or unfamiliar food at a time. One way to do this is to provide a small amount for children to sample during mealtimes. Another way is to introduce a new food with familiar foods. For example, if bell peppers are new to the menu, and leafy greens are a favorite, try adding fresh-diced bell peppers to a salad.





principle 4

Add Contrast

Strive for contrasts in texture, flavor, and methods of preparation.

Use foods with different textures to enhance taste and appearance

- Include different textures in the same meal or snack, such as soft, crisp, smooth, fluffy, crunchy, and creamy. For example, cucumber wedges and hummus provide a combination of crunchy, smooth, and creamy textures. Other examples might include crisp kale chips, crunchy carrot strips, and fluffy mashed potatoes.

Vary the types of food on the menu

- A menu with too many starches, sweet flavors, or heavy (filling) foods lacks balance. When serving these foods, pair them with colorful fresh, raw, or lightly cooked fruits and vegetables.

Use pleasing combinations of sizes and shapes of foods

- Present foods in several different shapes, such as cubes, wedges, strips, rounds, and shredded bits. A meal with cubed meat, diced potatoes, mixed vegetables, and fruit cocktail needs more contrast because they are all similar in size and shape. However, replacing the diced potatoes with potato wedges or serving thinly sliced apples instead of fruit cocktail adds more contrast to the menu.

principle 5

Think About Color

Use a variety of color combinations at all meals and snacks.

Use foods with a variety of colors in each meal

- A good practice for adding color is to use at least three colorful foods in each meal. For example, turkey, rice, cauliflower, pears, and milk are similar in color; a better combination to increase color is turkey with cranberry sauce, steamed broccoli, whole wheat roll, orange slices, and milk.

Incorporate fruits and vegetables to add color

- Use fruits and vegetables with a variety of colors like dark-green, red, orange, purple, white, and blue. Add color to the plate and a broad range of nutrients. For example, serve green kiwi at breakfast, and orange peaches and red bell peppers at lunch to increase the colors on the menu.

Use colorful foods in combination with those that have little or no color

- Think about food items that have very little color, such as mashed potatoes and baked chicken, and pair them with colorful foods. For example, serve broccoli spears with mashed potatoes or strawberries and carrot slices with a turkey burger.

Sprinkle herbs and spices on top of food for added color

- Herbs and spices are great for adding splashes of color to the plate. For example, add a dash of cinnamon on oatmeal or canned fruit or a little paprika on potatoes or eggs for color.





principle 6

Consider Eye Appeal

Young children often decide what to eat based on their first impression of the food. Always focus on preparing and serving visually appealing meals and snacks to young children.

Consider the way food looks on plates and bowls

- One way to ensure meals are visually appealing is to prepare a sample plate before each mealtime. Another way to add visual appeal is to use colorful dishes.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are four key points to consider when applying the menu planning principles.

Incorporate seasonal foods

- Seasonal foods may be less expensive and often taste better.

Think about the climate of each season

- During the winter months, plan to include hot foods, such as vegetable soup, as the main dish. In the summer months, include cold foods, such as strawberries and yogurt for a cool and refreshing snack.

Focus on regional food preferences

- Consider the regional and cultural food preferences of the children in your care and regularly offer them along side new foods. This way encourages children to try new foods.

Plan for holidays and other special occasions

- Plan menus that emphasize program events, national holidays, and special occasions celebrated in your child care setting.





MENU PLANNING STEPS

As you begin to plan menus, it is helpful to follow a step-by-step process. Keep these steps in mind when planning menus. This approach can reduce the time for planning menus, and it can help to align them with the CACFP meal pattern requirements.

- Prepare for planning menus
- Think about the changes you would like to make
- Determine the length of the menu
- Select the main dish for lunch
- Select the remaining menu items for lunch
- Plan menus for breakfast
- Plan menus for each snack
- Evaluate what you have planned



step 1

Prepare for planning menus

- Plan menus at least a month in advance of the time they will be served. Choose a time when you can focus on menu planning without distractions.
- Collect menu planning resources that will help you to organize the process, such as the following examples:
 - Previous menus
 - Standardized recipes
 - Food budget
 - List of foods you currently purchase
 - A copy of the CACFP meal patterns
 - A menu planning template

A sample menu template is included in the Appendix section for planning your menus.

- (Optional) Establish a menu planning team for input on planning diverse, appealing, and nutritious menus. The team may consist of a parent, child, dietitian, and/or staff.



step 2

Think about the changes you would like to make

- Read previously planned menus, food purchasing records, and production records to determine overall effectiveness.
- Keep children's nutritional needs and preferences in mind.
- Evaluate your current menus based on the six menu planning principles:
 - Focus on good nutrition
 - Strive for balance
 - Emphasize variety
 - Add contrast
 - Think about color
 - Consider eye appeal
- Take into account the budget for your menu.
- Make notes of any changes you would like to make when planning a new menu or revising a previously planned menu.

step 3

Determine the length of the menu

- A cycle menu is a series of menus planned for a period (for example, 3 weeks). The menu is different for each day of the cycle. After the entire menu is served, the first cycle is complete. The menus are then repeated in the same order.
- A cycle menu should be planned for at least 3 weeks to ensure the children are not served the same combination of foods too often.

There are many advantages to using cycle menus

- Using cycle menus saves time when planning and preparing meals because the same menus are repeated in the same order.
- Buying food is easier since you know what you will use ahead of time and know how much to purchase.
- Cycle menus are easy to change once they are planned. You can substitute foods that are not available with other foods from the same meal component.

step 4

Select the main dish for lunch

- The entrées or main dishes are the central focus of the meal; when selected first, they form the framework for planning the rest of the menu.
- Begin by selecting the main dish for each lunch menu. It is usually the meat/meat alternate component.
 - When possible, incorporate other ingredients that contribute to the main dish, such as breads, pasta, rice, and vegetables.
- Emphasize variety; choose a different main dish for each day of the cycle.
 - Incorporate a variety of different meats/meat alternates dishes for the menu cycle, such as lean meats and beans, peas, or lentils.









step 5

Select the remaining menu items for lunch

- Add all other food item(s) to meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements for lunch:
 - Fluid milk
 - Fruits
 - Vegetables
 - Grains
- Include food items that complement the main dish.
- Include at least one whole grain-rich food per day. These are foods in which the grain content is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain, with any remaining grains being enriched.
- Incorporate seasonal fruits and vegetables.
- Incorporate “other foods,” such as condiments or water, making certain to include all necessary items for each meal.

step 6

Plan menus for breakfast

- Follow the same menu planning principles used when planning the lunch menu.
- Include the required meal pattern components for breakfast:
 - Fluid milk
 - Fruits, vegetables, or both
 - Grains
- Add variety by replacing the grains component with a meat or meat alternate a maximum of three times per week.



step 7

Plan menus for each snack

- Follow the same menu planning principles used when planning the lunch and breakfast menus.
- Include two of the five CACFP meal pattern components for snacks:
 - Fluid milk
 - Fruits
 - Vegetables
 - Grains
 - Meats/meat alternates
- Plan to include water as the beverage for snacks.

step 8

Evaluate what you have planned

Before ending your menu planning session, evaluate your menus to ensure they are nutritious, appealing, and in compliance with the CACFP. Review the menus based on the following areas:

- Basic Meal Pattern Requirements
 - Do the menus meet the CACFP meal patterns requirements?
 - Is juice limited to once per day for children and not included for infant meals or snacks?
 - Are the menus free of grain-based desserts?
 - Is at least one serving of grains whole grain-rich for each day?
 - Are the menus free of foods requiring deep-fat frying?
 - Are the infant menus free of cheese foods or cheese spreads?
- Foods Selected
 - Is there balance in flavors and types of food?
 - Is there contrast in textures and types of food?
 - Are there multiple colors in each menu?
 - Does the menu have eye appeal?
 - Is good nutrition obvious in each meal? (whole grains, a variety of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, limited added sugar and salt)
 - Is there a variety of seasonal foods?
 - Are there new food items listed on the menu?
- Preparation
 - Can some preparation be done safely ahead of time?
 - Do you have enough space and the right equipment to prepare and serve each meal and snack?
- Cost
 - Did you consider the cost of the menu? Is there a balance of high and low-cost foods?
- Menus and Recipes
 - Do the menus complement each other?
 - Do the menus repeat any of the foods selected for other meals on that day?
 - Are serving sizes stated in the correct amounts?
- Special Considerations
 - Do the menus reflect any special events, holidays, etc.?
 - Are the menus age-appropriate?
 - Are considerations made for children with special needs or preferences? (Use current USDA recommendations and state guidelines.)





SAMPLE MENU, RECIPES, & SHOPPING LIST

Menus, recipes, and shopping lists are essential tools for meeting the meal pattern requirements and the nutritional needs of young children. As you explore these three tools in this section, there are a few key points to keep in mind.

The sample menu meets the CACFP meal pattern requirements for the three through five-year-olds' age group. Some of the menu items include names of dishes with an asterisk (*). This indicates that a USDA standardized recipe follows the sample menu.

Each recipe includes yields for 6 or 25 servings. You may need to adjust the recipe yield up or down, depending on the number of children in your care. All recipe crediting is for three through five-year-olds.

A shopping list for the sample menu is shown after the recipes. This list is designed to help you develop food shopping lists based on your facility's needs.

Lastly, recipe resources follow the shopping list. These tools include some helpful tips for using recipes and templates for planning menus and shopping lists.

sample menu

	Meal Components	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast Select all 3 components	Milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk
	Fruits, Vegetables, or Combination of Both	Sliced strawberries	Baked apples	Banana slices	Blueberries	Diced bell peppers
	Grains	Whole grain, cold cereal	Whole grain toast	Whole wheat pancakes	Oatmeal with a dash of cinnamon	Scrambled eggs**
Lunch Select all 5 components	Milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk	1% or fat-free milk
	Meats/Meat Alternates	Bean and cheese burrito (Whole grain tortilla)	Roasted sliced turkey	Chicken Stir-Fry* (brown rice)	Easy Zucchini Lasagna*	Tuna sandwich (Whole grain bread)
	Vegetables	Mexicali corn	Fresh celery slices	Snap peas	Easy Zucchini Lasagna*	Steamed broccoli
	Fruits	Fresh orange slices	Fresh cantaloupe	Mandarin oranges (canned in juice)	Apple slices	Fresh blueberries
	Grains	Whole grain tortilla	Jollof rice (Brown rice)	Brown rice	Whole grain bread sticks	Whole grain bread
Snack Select 2 of the 5 components	Milk Meats/Meat Alternates Vegetables Fruits Grains	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water
		Carrot and celery sticks	Carrot Raisin Salad*	Cheddar cheese	Black Bean Hummus*	Sweet Potato Wedges*
		String cheese	Carrot Raisin Salad*	Whole wheat crackers	Whole corn crisps	Yogurt

*A recipe is available for this food.

** At breakfast, it is optional to serve a meat/meat alternate in place of the grains component a maximum of 3 days.

sample shopping list

Fruits		Vegetables	
<input type="checkbox"/> Apples <input type="checkbox"/> Bananas <input type="checkbox"/> Blueberries <input type="checkbox"/> Canned Mandarin oranges <input type="checkbox"/> Canned peaches <input type="checkbox"/> Canned pineapple <input type="checkbox"/> Cantaloupe <input type="checkbox"/> Frozen raspberries <input type="checkbox"/> Green apples <input type="checkbox"/> Kiwi <input type="checkbox"/> Lemon juice <input type="checkbox"/> Oranges <input type="checkbox"/> Pears <input type="checkbox"/> Pineapple juice <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberries <input type="checkbox"/> Unsweetened applesauce		<input type="checkbox"/> Broccoli <input type="checkbox"/> Canned black beans <input type="checkbox"/> Canned chickpeas <input type="checkbox"/> Canned corn <input type="checkbox"/> Carrots <input type="checkbox"/> Celery <input type="checkbox"/> Cilantro <input type="checkbox"/> Frozen edamame <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic <input type="checkbox"/> Ginger <input type="checkbox"/> Green and red peppers <input type="checkbox"/> Mexicali corn	<input type="checkbox"/> Onion <input type="checkbox"/> Parsley <input type="checkbox"/> Romaine lettuce <input type="checkbox"/> Red leaf lettuce <input type="checkbox"/> Salsa <input type="checkbox"/> Spinach <input type="checkbox"/> Sugar snap peas <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet potatoes <input type="checkbox"/> Tomatoes <input type="checkbox"/> Tomato paste <input type="checkbox"/> Tomato sauce
Meats/Meat Alternates		Grains	
<input type="checkbox"/> Boneless, skinless chicken breast <input type="checkbox"/> Canned, low-fat, refried beans <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese <input type="checkbox"/> Cottage cheese <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Ground beef <input type="checkbox"/> Ground turkey <input type="checkbox"/> Pork tenderloin <input type="checkbox"/> Roasted sliced turkey <input type="checkbox"/> String cheese <input type="checkbox"/> Tuna, packed in water <input type="checkbox"/> Yogurt		<input type="checkbox"/> Brown rice <input type="checkbox"/> Oatmeal <input type="checkbox"/> Whole corn chips <input type="checkbox"/> Whole grain bread <input type="checkbox"/> Whole grain bread sticks <input type="checkbox"/> Whole grain cereal <input type="checkbox"/> Whole grain tortilla <input type="checkbox"/> Whole grain tortilla chips <input type="checkbox"/> Whole wheat flour	<p>Be sure to check the most recent USDA guidance regarding serving grains and whole grain-rich items as part of the CACFP.</p>
Milk		Other	
<input type="checkbox"/> Low-fat (1%) or fat-free <input type="checkbox"/> Fat-free <input type="checkbox"/> Instant nonfat dry <input type="checkbox"/> Whole for 12 through 23 Months	<input type="checkbox"/> Apple cider vinegar <input type="checkbox"/> Baking powder <input type="checkbox"/> Basil <input type="checkbox"/> Brown sugar <input type="checkbox"/> Canola oil <input type="checkbox"/> Chili sauce <input type="checkbox"/> Cornstarch <input type="checkbox"/> Cumin <input type="checkbox"/> Dry rolled oats <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic powder <input type="checkbox"/> Golden raisins	<input type="checkbox"/> Ground black pepper <input type="checkbox"/> Ground celery seed <input type="checkbox"/> Ground cinnamon <input type="checkbox"/> Ground nutmeg <input type="checkbox"/> Ground white pepper <input type="checkbox"/> Honey* <input type="checkbox"/> Instant potato flakes <input type="checkbox"/> Italian dressing <input type="checkbox"/> Low-sodium chicken broth <input type="checkbox"/> Low-sodium soy sauce <input type="checkbox"/> Mayonnaise	<input type="checkbox"/> Olive oil <input type="checkbox"/> Onion powder <input type="checkbox"/> Red pepper flakes <input type="checkbox"/> Salt <input type="checkbox"/> Shredded coconut <input type="checkbox"/> Soft margarine <input type="checkbox"/> Sugar <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet and sour sauce <input type="checkbox"/> Water

*Prevent botulism (a life-threatening illness) by never serving infants honey or foods containing honey.



.Note: Image is for design
purposes only. This recipe

easy zucchini lasagna

ingredients	6 servings	25 servings
• Mozzarella cheese, low-fat, shredded	2 ½ ounces (2 ½ ounce equals ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons)	2 ½ cups 2 tablespoons
• Cottage cheese, fat-free	1 cup	1 quart ¼ cup
• Tomato paste, canned, low-sodium	3 tablespoons	¾ cup
• Tomato sauce, canned	1 cup	1 quart 2 tablespoons
• Oregano, dried	1 teaspoon	1 tablespoon 1 teaspoon
• Basil leaves, dried	1 teaspoon Basil, dried	1 tablespoon 1 teaspoon
• Onions, fresh, peeled	2 ⅝ ounces (2 ⅝ ounce equals ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon)	2 ¼ cups
• Garlic cloves, minced	2 cloves (1 clove is about ½ teaspoon minced)	8 cloves or 1 tablespoon 1 teaspoon
• Black pepper, ground	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Zucchini, unpeeled, thinly sliced	1 ½ cups	1 quart 2 ½ cups
• Lasagna noodles, enriched, oven-ready	3 ⅜ ounces (6 sheets)	25 sheets
• Parmesan cheese, shredded	1 tablespoon	¼ cup
• Nonstick cooking spray	1 spray	1 spray

directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 °F.
2. Reserve some of the mozzarella cheese and set aside. Reserve ⅓ cup (6 servings) or 1 ⅓ cups (25 servings).
3. To make cheesy-tomato sauce: combine remaining mozzarella cheese, cottage cheese, tomato paste, tomato sauce, oregano, basil, onions, garlic, and black pepper in a large bowl.
4. Divide zucchini evenly into two parts: about ¾ cups (6 servings) or two parts of 3 ¼ cups (25 servings).
5. Assembly: Lightly coat about 8" x 8" (6 servings) or 12" x 20" x 2 ½" (25 servings) baking pan with pan release spray.
6. First layer: Spread 3 ½ cups of cheesy-tomato sauce evenly on the bottom of each pan. Cover sauce with oven-ready lasagna noodles. Then, cover noodles with zucchini slices.
7. Second layer: Repeat first layer.
8. Third layer: Top layers 1 and 2 with the remaining cheesy-tomato sauce and then finish by sprinkling on the reserved shredded mozzarella cheese and the parmesan cheese.
9. Cover tightly with foil and bake until zucchini is tender. Conventional oven: 350 °F for 45 minutes.
10. Remove from oven. Remove foil and bake uncovered until cheese starts to brown slightly. Conventional oven: 350 °F for 15 minutes. Critical Control Point: Heat to 140 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
11. Remove from oven. Let lasagna rest for 10 minutes before cutting. Critical Control Point: Hold at 140 °F or higher.
12. Serve 1 piece (2" x 3 ¾" piece) portion size.

CACFP Crediting Information: 1 piece provides 1 ounce equivalent meat alternate, ½ cup vegetable, and ½ ounce equivalent grains.

black bean hummus

ingredients	6 servings	25 servings
• Canned low-sodium black beans, rinsed, drained	2 cups	1 quart 1 ⅓ cups (approx. ¾ No. 10 can)
• Canned low-sodium chickpeas, rinsed, drained	2 cups	1 quart 3 ⅓ cups 2 teaspoons (approx. ¾ No. 10 can)
• Lemon juice	½ cup	2 ¼ cups
• Garlic	⅛ cup	1 ⅓ cups
• Olive oil	1 tablespoon	3 tablespoons
• Salt	¾ teaspoon	¾ teaspoon
• Cumin	1 teaspoon	1 tablespoon
• Ground white pepper	¼ teaspoon	1 ½ teaspoons
• Fresh cilantro, diced	⅔ cup	2 ½ cups 2 tablespoons
• Whole grain tortilla chips (optional)	60 chips	250 chips

directions

1. Combine black beans, chickpeas, lemon juice, garlic, oil, salt, cumin, and pepper in a food processor, and blend at medium speed for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Mixture should have a smooth consistency. Do not overmix.
2. Remove bean mixture and pour into a large mixing bowl (6 servings) or a 12" x 20" x 2 ½" steam table pan (25 servings).
3. Add cilantro and stir well.
4. Cover and refrigerate at 40 °F. Critical Control Point: Cool to 40 °F or lower within 4 hours. Critical Control Point: Hold at 40 °F or lower.
5. Serve chilled with chips (optional). Portion with No. 8 scoop (½ cup).

CACFP Crediting Information: ½ cup (No. 8 scoop) provides legume as meat/meat alternate: 2 ounces meat/meat alternate. OR Legume as Vegetable: ½ cup vegetable.

Source: USDA Recipes for CACFP Home Child Care and USDA Recipes for CACFP





chicken stir-fry

ingredients

6 servings

25 servings

• Frozen, cooked, diced chicken, thawed ½-inch pieces	1 ¼ cups (5 ¾ ounces)	1 quart 1 cup 2 tablespoons 2 ½ teaspoons
• Low-sodium soy sauce	2 tablespoons	¼ cup
• Chili sauce	1 ½ teaspoons	1 tablespoon 1 ½ teaspoons
• Cornstarch	¼ cup	¾ cup
• Fresh ginger, chopped	1 ½ teaspoons	1 tablespoon 2 teaspoons
• Garlic, minced	1 ½ teaspoons	1 tablespoon 2 teaspoons
• Ground black pepper	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Red pepper flakes	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Salt	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Sugar	¼ cup 1 teaspoon	¾ cup 2 tablespoons
• Low-sodium chicken broth	1 cup	1 quart
• Pineapple juice, 100% juice	½ cup	2 cups
• Fresh broccoli crowns, chopped	3 cups (2 ¼ ounce)	3 quarts 3 tablespoons
• Canola oil	⅓ cup	⅓ cup 2 teaspoons
• Frozen edamame, thawed	2 ⅓ cups	2 quarts ¾ cup
• Canned pineapple tidbits in 100% juice, drained	⅓ cup (1 20-ounce can)	3 cups 2 tablespoons 1 ½ teaspoons (½ No. 10 can)
• Fresh carrots, shredded	1 ⅔ cup (4 ½ ounces)	1 quart 3 cups
• Fresh onions, sliced	⅓ cup	1 ⅓ cups 1 tablespoon 2 ¾ teaspoons
• Fresh bell peppers, chopped	⅓ cup	1 ½ cups
• Water	½ cup	2 cups
• Fresh cilantro, chopped	⅓ cup	1 ⅓ cups 1 ⅛ teaspoons

directions

- Combine chicken, soy sauce, chili sauce, 2 tablespoons cornstarch, ¾ teaspoon ginger, ¾ teaspoon garlic black pepper, red pepper flakes, salt, and sugar in a large mixing bowl. For 25 servings, use ⅓ cup 2 teaspoons cornstarch, 2 ½ teaspoons ginger, and 2 ½ teaspoons garlic. Stir well.
- Cover tightly. Set remaining ginger and garlic aside for step 7. Set remaining cornstarch aside for step 8. Allow chicken mixture to marinate for 12 to 24 hours.
- Place marinated chicken into a large pot uncovered over high heat for 2–3 minutes, stirring constantly.
- Add ½ cup chicken broth and ¼ cup pineapple juice (6 servings) or 2 cups chicken broth and 1 cup pineapple juice (25 servings). Heat to a rolling boil allowing mixture to thicken. Heat to 165 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds. Set remaining chicken broth and pineapple juice aside for step 8.
- Pour chicken mixture into a 9" x 11" nonstick baking pan (6 servings) or transfer 2 quart 2 cups (about 5 pound) chicken mixture to a 12" x 20" x 2 ½" steam table pan (25 servings). Set aside for step 10.
- Boil broccoli in a large pot for 60 seconds or until bright green. Drain in a colander. Set aside for step 7.
- Heat canola oil in a large stockpot.
- Add boiled broccoli, edamame, pineapples, carrots, onions, bell peppers, and remaining ginger and garlic. Sauté uncovered for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Add remaining chicken broth and pineapple juice. Heat to a rolling boil. Add remaining cornstarch.
- Add water. Stir well. Allow mixture to thicken. Heat to 140 °F or higher.
- Pour vegetable mixture over chicken mixture in baking pan (6 servings) or transfer 1 gallon 1 quart (about 8 pounds 15 ounces) vegetable mixture over chicken mixture into a 12" x 20" x 2 ½" steam table pan (25 servings). Stir well to combine.
- Garnish with cilantro.
- Serve warm. Critical Control Point: Hold for hot service at 140 °F or higher. Portion with 8-fluid-ounce spoodle (1 cup).

CACFP Crediting Information: 1 cup (8-fluid-ounce spoodle) provides legume as meat/meat alternate - 2 ounce meat/meat alternate, ½ cup vegetable, and ⅛ cup fruit. OR Legume as Vegetable - 0.75 ounce meat/meat alternate, ¾ cup vegetable, and ⅛ cup fruit.
Source: USDA Recipes for CACFP Home Child Care and USDA Recipes for CACFP

carrot raisin salad

ingredients	6 servings	25 servings
• Low-fat yogurt	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups
• Low-fat mayonnaise	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup
• Salt	$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon	$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon
• Ground nutmeg	$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon
• Apple cider vinegar	1 tablespoon 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup 2 teaspoons
• Honey	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	1 cup
• Fresh carrots, shredded	1 cup	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups 1 tablespoon 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons
• Canned pineapples tidbits in 100% juice, drained (one 20 oz can)	1 cup	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups 2 tablespoons ($\frac{1}{2}$ No. 10 can)
• Fresh green apples, cored, diced, unpeeled	1 cup	3 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups
• Golden raisins	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoons
• Shredded coconut	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup

directions

1. Dressing: Combine yogurt, mayonnaise, salt, nutmeg, vinegar, and honey in a small mixing bowl. Stir well. Set dressing aside for step 3.
2. Combine carrots, pineapple tidbits, apples, and raisins in a large mixing bowl. Toss lightly.
3. Pour dressing over fruit and vegetable mixture. Stir well.
4. Garnish with coconut.
5. Cover and refrigerate. Critical Control Point: Cool to 40 °F or lower within 4 hours. Critical Control Point: Hold at 40 °F or lower.
6. Serve chilled. Portion with No. 8 scoop ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup).

CACFP Crediting Information: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (No. 8 scoop) provides $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fruit.

Source: USDA Recipes for CACFP Home Child Care and USDA Recipes for CACFP





jollof rice

ingredients	6 servings	24 servings
• Canola oil	2 tablespoons	¼ cup
• Fresh onions, diced	⅓ cup	1 ¾ cups
• Ground ginger	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Garlic, minced	½ teaspoon	1 tablespoon
• Fresh red bell peppers, diced	⅓ cup	1 ¼ cups
• Canned no-salt-added diced tomatoes, undrained	⅓ cup	¾ cup 3 tablespoons 1 ½ teaspoons
• Canned no-salt-added tomato sauce	¼ cup	¾ cup 2 tablespoons 1 ½ teaspoons
• Salt	¼ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
• Cayenne pepper	1 dash	⅛ teaspoon
• Paprika	1 dash	⅛ teaspoon
• Ground curry powder	½ teaspoon	1 tablespoon
• Vegetable stock	1 cup	1 quart
• Brown rice, long-grain, regular, dry, parboiled	1 cup	1 quart 2 tablespoons 1 ½ teaspoons
• Frozen peas and carrots, thawed, drained	⅔ cup	2 ⅓ cups 1 tablespoon
• Fresh cilantro, finely chopped	⅓ cup	1 ¾ cups

directions

1. Heat canola oil in a large pot.
2. Add onions, ginger, garlic, and bell peppers. Sauté uncovered over medium heat for about 2–3 minutes or until translucent.
3. Add diced tomatoes, tomato sauce, salt, pepper, paprika, and curry powder. Heat uncovered over medium heat for 5 minutes or until liquid is reduced and tomatoes begin to soften, stirring frequently.
4. Add vegetable stock. Stir well. Set tomato mixture aside for step 6.
5. Pour rice into a nonstick baking pan.
6. Pour tomato mixture over rice. Stir well. Cover pan tightly with foil. Bake at 350 °F for 45 minutes. Heat to an internal temperature of 140 °F or higher (use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature).
7. Remove from oven. Fluff rice mixture and set aside for step 8.
8. Steam peas and carrots for 1 minute. Fold vegetables into rice mixture.
9. Garnish with cilantro.
10. Serve warm.

CACFP Crediting Information: ½ cup provides ⅛ cup vegetable, and ½ serving grains.
Source: USDA Recipes for CACFP Home Child Care and USDA Recipes for CACFP

recipe resources

Keep a computer file or printed binder of recipes suitable for children.

- Organize your recipes. One way might include dividing them into categories such as main dishes, vegetables, fruits, sauces and dressings, etc.
- Some sources may include the following examples:
 - Team Nutrition Cooks: <https://icn.ms/tncooks>
 - USDA Team Nutrition Look and Cook Recipes: <https://icn.ms/2DqEHnn>
 - USDA Team Nutrition, CACFP Recipes: <http://icn.ms/2tqEuMI>
 - Child Nutrition Recipe Box: <https://theicn.org/cnrb/>
 - USDA Team Nutrition, Recipes for Healthy Kids: Cookbook for Child Care Centers: <https://icn.ms/2JJANGU>
 - USDA Team Nutrition, Recipes for Healthy Kids: Cookbook for Homes: <https://icn.ms/2zCEvgm>

Select recipes that include all the necessary information for preparing the food correctly.

- Yield: The serving size and the number of servings in a recipe.
- Ingredients: The name of each ingredient and the form to use (such as fresh, frozen, canned).
- Measurements: The weight or volume of an ingredient

Make note of any changes to the recipe.

If you have to substitute one ingredient for another (dry pasta instead of refrigerated pasta), make a note of the change on the recipe. Also, note how the change affected the quality. This information is essential when deciding to continue substituting the ingredient or if it is necessary to choose a different option in the future.

Keep in mind that when an ingredient is changed, the contribution to the CACFP meal pattern may change. For example, substituting canned pinto beans for the same amount of ground beef in a burrito may change the meat/meat alternate contribution (or creditable amount) for the meal.

recipe resources

Pan Size and Volume Equivalents					
Pan Size	Approx. Capacity	Serving Size	Ladle (fl oz)	Scoop #	Approx. # Servings
12" x 20" x 2 ½"	2 gal	½ cup	4 oz	8	64
		¾ cup	3 oz	10	80
		⅓ cup	2.65 oz	12	96
		¼ cup	2 oz	16	128
12" x 20" x 4"	3 ½ gal	½ cup	4 oz	8	112
		¾ cup	3 oz	10	135
		⅓ cup	2.65 oz	12	168
		¼ cup	2 oz	16	224
12" x 20" x 6"	5 gal	½ cup	4 oz	8	160
		¾ cup	3 oz	10	200
		⅓ cup	2.65 oz	12	240
		¼ cup	2 oz	16	320

Scoops	
Scoop Number	Level
6	⅓ cup
8	½ cup
10	¾ cup
12	⅓ cup
16	¼ cup
20	3 ⅓ tablespoons
24	2 ⅔ tablespoons
30	2 tablespoons
40	1 ⅔ tablespoons
50	3 ¾ teaspoons
60	3 ¼ teaspoons
70	2 ¾ teaspoons
100	2 teaspoons

Abbreviations	
c	cup
fl oz	fluid ounce
g	gram
gal	gallon
kg	kilogram
L	liter
lb	pound
mL	milliliter
oz	ounce
pt	pint
qt	quart
tblsp	tablespoon
tsp	teaspoon
vol	volume
wt	weight

Volume Equivalents for Liquids		
60 drops	= 1 tsp	
1 tblsp	= 3 tsp	= 0.5 fl oz
⅓ cup	= 2 tblsp	= 1 fl oz
¼ cup	= 4 tblsp	= 2 fl oz
⅓ cup	= 5 tblsp + 1 tsp	= 2.65 fl oz
⅔ cup	= 6 tblsp	= 3 fl oz
½ cup	= 8 tblsp	= 4 fl oz
⅝ cup	= 10 tblsp	= 5 fl oz
⅔ cup	= 10 tblsp + 2 tsp	= 5.3 fl oz
¾ cup	= 12 tblsp	= 6 fl oz
⅞ cup	= 14 tblsp	= 7 fl oz
1 cup	= 16 tblsp	= 8 fl oz
½ pint	= 1 cup	= 8 fl oz
1 pint	= 2 cups	= 16 fl oz
1 quart	= 2 pt	= 32 fl oz
1 gallon	= 4 qt	= 128 fl oz





TIPS FOR ADDING VARIETY

Eating a variety of nutritious foods is the cornerstone of healthy eating. To make sure children get all the nutrients needed for good health, they need to eat a variety of foods. Therefore, consider the lists and tips, featured in this section, for adding more variety to the menu.

seasonal fruits and vegetables

Tip: Choose seasonal fruits and vegetables to help reduce food cost.

Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apples• Bananas• Beets• Broccoli• Brussels Sprouts• Carrots• Cauliflower• Cranberries• Garlic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ginger• Grapes• Mushrooms• Parsnips• Pears• Pineapple• Pumpkins• Sweet Potatoes and Yams• Winter Squash	
Winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bananas• Grapefruit• Lemons• Mushrooms• Onions and Leeks• Oranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pears• Potatoes• Sweet Potatoes and Yams• Turnips• Winter Squash	
Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apricots• Bananas• Broccoli• Cabbage• Green Beans• Honeydew Melon• Lettuce• Mangos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mushrooms• Onions and Leeks• Peas• Pineapple• Rhubarb• Spinach• Strawberries	
Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apricots• Bananas• Beets• Bell Peppers• Blackberries• Blueberries• Cantaloupe• Cherries• Corn• Cucumbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eggplant• Garlic• Grapefruits• Grapes• Green Beans• Honeydew Melon• Kiwi• Lima Beans• Mushrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peaches• Peas• Plums• Radishes• Raspberries• Strawberries• Summer Squash and Zucchini• Tomatoes• Watermelon



Fall



Winter



Spring



Summer



**Red and Orange
Vegetables**



**Dark-Green
Vegetables**



**Starchy
Vegetables**



**Dry Beans and
Peas**



**Other
Vegetables**

vegetable list subgroups

Tip: Go for variety and color from each of these vegetable subgroups.

Red and Orange Vegetables

- Acorn squash
- Butternut squash
- Carrots
- Hubbard squash
- Pumpkin
- Red peppers
- Sweet potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Tomato juice (low-sodium)

Starchy Vegetables

- Cassava
- Corn
- Fresh cowpeas or field peas
- Green bananas
- Green peas
- Green lima beans
- Plantains
- Potatoes
- Taro
- Water chestnuts

Other Vegetables

- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Avocado
- Bean sprouts
- Beets
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Crookneck squash
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Green beans
- Green peppers
- Iceberg (head) lettuce
- Mushrooms
- Okra
- Onions
- Parsnips
- Turnips
- Wax beans
- Zucchini

Beans, Peas, and Lentils

- Black beans
- Black-eyed peas
- Edamame
- Garbanzo beans (chickpeas)
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Navy beans
- Pinto beans
- Split peas
- White beans

Dark-Green Vegetables

- Arugula (rocket)
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Collard greens
- Dark-green leafy lettuce
- Endive
- Escarole
- Kale
- Mesclun
- Mixed greens
- Mustard greens
- Romaine lettuce
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Turnip greens
- Watercress

whole grains

Tip: Focus on variety by serving different types of whole grains.

Serving a variety of grains, especially whole grains, is beneficial for good health. Whole grains are great sources of dietary fiber, B vitamins, iron, and other essential nutrients.

Eating these foods as part of a balanced diet, can help to fuel the body, feel fuller longer, and reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases. Therefore, choose a variety of whole

Types of Whole Grains

- Amaranth
- Amaranth flour
- Brown rice
- Buckwheat
- Buckwheat flour
- Buckwheat groats
- Bulgur
- Cracked wheat
- Graham flour
- Instant oatmeal
- Millet
- Millet flour
- Oat groats
- Old fashioned oats
- Quick cooking oats
- Quinoa
- Rye groats
- Sorghum
- Sorghum flour
- Spelt berries
- Sprouted brown rice
- Sprouted buckwheat
- Sprouted einkorn
- Sprouted spelt
- Sprouted whole rye
- Sprouted whole wheat
- Steel cut oats
- Teff
- Teff flour
- Triticale
- Triticale flour
- Wheat berries
- Wheat groats
- Whole corn
- Whole durum flour
- Whole einkorn berries
- Whole grain corn
- Whole grain corn flour
- Whole grain einkorn flour
- Whole grain oat flour
- Whole grain spelt flour
- Whole grain wheat flakes
- Whole rye flour
- Whole wheat flour
- Wild rice



Whole Grain Menu Ideas

- Amaranth and quinoa porridge
- Barley and vegetable soup
- Bircher muesli
- Leafy salad with whole wheat croutons
- Oatmeal pancakes
- Popped sorghum
- Roasted quinoa
- Soba noodles
(with whole buckwheat flour as primary ingredient)
- Spelt pretzels
- Teff chips
- Turkey fajitas with whole wheat tortilla
- Whole grain bagel topped with fruit
- Whole grain cornbread
- Whole grain ready-to-eat cereals
- Whole grain tortillas, taco shells
- Whole wheat cornbread muffins
- Whole wheat pasta
(e.g., macaroni vermicelli, or spaghetti)



meats and meat alternates

Tip: Focus on variety by incorporating all types of meats and meat alternates on the menu.

Strategies for Incorporating Meats and Meat Alternates

- Fish and seafood (fresh, frozen, or canned) are good choices for mealtime. Try salmon, tuna, trout, and tilapia prepared in different ways, such as baked, grilled, or in sandwiches or tacos.
- Cooked, canned, or frozen beans, peas, and lentils are all great options. Vary the choices for beans, peas, and lentils.
- Poultry, like chicken or turkey, can be served grilled or roasted and also as an ingredient in pastas or burritos.
- Look for lean cuts of meat, including beef, pork, and lamb. Try round steaks and roasts (round eye, top round, bottom round, round tip), top loin, top sirloin, and chuck shoulder and arm roasts. The leanest pork choices include pork loin, tenderloin, or center loin.
- Choose the leanest ground meats possible (including beef, pork, chicken, and turkey), preferably meats labeled “90% lean” or higher. The higher the percent (%) number, the lower the amount of solid fats in the meat.
- Offer unsalted, chopped, or finely ground nuts and seeds (including almonds, mixed nuts, peanuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds) and peanut and sunflower seed butters spread thinly.
- Prepare and serve eggs in different ways. Try hard-boiled egg slices, scrambled eggs, or deviled eggs (prepared with low-fat mayonnaise or mustard). Make sure the egg whites and yolks are cooked thoroughly to avoid foodborne illness.
- Yogurt and cheese can be credited as a meat alternate. Offer yogurt labeled fat-free or low-fat (1%). When selecting cheese, choose low-fat or reduced-fat versions. Avoid packages that read, “processed cheese product,” as this is not real cheese.





boost flavors with herbs and spices

Tip: Use herbs and spices to boost flavors without added sugar and salt.

Common Herbs		
Name	Taste	Uses
Basil	Mint licorice like flavor	Pizza, spaghetti sauce, tomato dishes, vegetable soups, meat pies, peas, zucchini, green beans
Chives	In the onion family; delicate flavor	Baked potato topping, all cooked green vegetables, green salads, cream sauces, cheese dishes
Cilantro	Sweet aroma, mildly peppery	Ingredient in Mexican foods
Cumin	Warm, distinctive, salty-sweet, resembles caraway	Ingredient in chili powder and curry powder; German cooks add to pork and sauerkraut and Dutch add to cheese
Mint	Strong and sweet with a cool aftertaste	Peppermint is the most common variety; popular flavor for candies and frozen desserts; many fruits, peas and carrots
Oregano	More pungent than marjoram, reminiscent of thyme	Pizza, other meat dishes, cheese and egg dishes; vegetables such as tomatoes, zucchini, or green beans; an ingredient in chili powder
Parsley	Sweet, mildly spicy, refreshing	A wide variety of cooked foods, salad dressings, and sandwich spreads
Rosemary	Refreshing, pine, resinous, pungent	Chicken dishes and vegetables such as eggplant, turnips, cauliflower, green beans, beets, and summer squash; enhances the flavor of citrus fruits
Sage	Pungent, warm, astringent	Meats, poultry stuffing, salad dressings; cheese; a main ingredient in poultry seasoning blend; an ingredient in a wide variety of commercial meat products
Thyme	Strong, pleasant, pungent clove flavor	New England clam chowder, Creole seafood dishes, Midwest poultry stuffing; blended with butter is good over green beans, eggplant, and tomatoes
Turmeric (tumeric)	Aromatic, warm, mild	Prepared mustard; a main ingredient in curry powder; chicken and seafood dishes, rice, creamed or mashed potatoes, macaroni; salad dressing for a seafood salad; in melted butter for corn on the cob



Common Spices		
Name	Taste	Uses
Allspice	The aroma suggests a blend of cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg; sweet flavor	Fruit cakes, pies, relishes, preserves, sweet yellow vegetables, such as sweet potatoes and tomatoes
Cinnamon	Warm, spicy sweet flavor	Cakes, buns, breads, cookies, and pies
Cloves	Hot, spicy, sweet, penetrating flavor	Whole cloves for baking hams and other pork, pickling fruits, and in stews and meat gravies; ground cloves in baked goods and desserts and to enhance the flavor of sweet vegetables, such as beets, sweet potatoes, and winter squash
Ginger	Aromatic, sweet, spicy, penetrating flavor	Baked goods; rubbed on meat, poultry, and fish; in stir-fry dishes
Nutmeg	Spicy, pleasant flavor	Seed of the nutmeg fruit for baked goods, puddings, sauces, vegetables; in spice blends for processed meat; mixed with butter for corn on the cob, spinach, and candied sweet potatoes
Paprika	Sweet, mild, or pungent flavor	A garnish spice, gives an appealing appearance to a wide variety of dishes; used in the production of processed meats such as sausage, salad dressings, and other prepared foods
Peppercorns	Hot, biting, very pungent	Many uses in a wide variety of foods; white pepper ideal in light-colored foods where dark specks might not be attractive





APPENDIX

- Menu Template
- Menu Planning Checklist
- Shopping List Template

Meal Requirements	YES/NO
Basic Meal Pattern Requirements	
Do the menus meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements?	
Is juice limited to once per day for children and included for infant meals or snacks?	
Are the menus free of grain-based desserts?	
Is at least one serving of grains whole grain-rich for each day?	
Are the menus free of foods requiring on-site frying?	
Are the infant menus free of cheese foods or cheese spreads?	
Foods Selected	
Is there balance in flavors and types of food?	
Is there contrast in textures and types of food?	
Is there color in each menu?	
Does the menu have eye appeal?	
Is good nutrition obvious in each meal? (e.g. whole grains, a variety of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, limited added sugar and salt)?	
Is there a variety of seasonal foods?	
Are there new food items listed on the menu?	
Preparation	
Can some preparation be done ahead safely?	
Do you have enough space and the right equipment to prepare and serve each meal and snack?	
Cost	
Did you consider the cost of the menu?	
Is there a balance of high and low-cost foods?	
Menus and Recipes	
Do the menus complement each other?	
Do the menus repeat any of the foods selected for other meals on that day?	
Are portion sizes stated in correct amounts?	
Special Considerations	
Do the menus reflect any special events, holidays, etc.?	
Are the menus age-appropriate?	
Are considerations made for children with special needs or preferences? Use current USDA recommendations and state guidelines.	

menu

	Meal Components	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast Select all 3 components	Milk					
	Fruits, Vegetables, or Combination of Both					
	Grains					
Lunch Select all 5 components	Milk					
	Meats/Meat Alternates					
	Vegetables					
	Fruits					
	Grains					
Snack Select 2 of the 5 components	Milk					
	Meats/Meat Alternates					
	Vegetables Fruits Grains					

At breakfast, it is optional to serve a meat/meat alternate in place of the grains component a maximum of 3 days.

shopping list

[illegible]

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