

Best Practices for Menu Planning

Thoughtful menu planning will ensure healthy, balanced and nutritious meals. The USDA has outlined the five basic steps of careful menu planning.



Strive for Balance

- **Balance flavors** Too much of any one flavor will make the plate unappealing for children.
- **Balance unhealthy fats** Serve high saturated fat foods with vegetables and fruits.

Contrast on the Plate to make meals more appealing. Consider the following:

- **Texture**
- **Taste**
- **Appearance**
- **Size and Shape of the Food**

Think about Color

- **Avoid all the same color.** Add at least two colors to your plate each meal.
- **Fruits and vegetables are great** for adding colors from the rainbow.
- **Add color to colorless foods,** pair mashed potatoes with broccoli.
- **Add spices to foods with little color.** Paprika or green herbs provide color to white potatoes.

Emphasize Variety

- **Food Choices** Serve a variety of different meat/meat alternates throughout the week. Try for hamburger one day and chicken the next. The same applies to your side dishes. Provide several options throughout the week.
- **Serving Style** There are many different ways to serve healthy foods: casseroles, soups, sandwiches and salads.
- **Food Form** Try out different ways of serving meats and vegetables. Prepare vegetables in various ways to include raw, steamed, roasted or in a salad. Vary your spices and seasonings.
- **Include a Surprise** Make meal time adventure time. Offer new foods with other foods that children are familiar with.

Consider Eye Appeal

- **Presentation is Key** If a plate does not look good visually, it is more difficult for a child to want to eat it.
- **Consider how food is presented** and placed on the table.