



MENU PLANNING IN THREE EASY STEPS

1. Plan Ahead

TIME FRAME

Two or more months ahead of the time you will serve the menu.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- USDA Recipes
- Recipes for Healthy Kids: Centers
- Recipes for Healthy Kids: Homes
- USDA Menu Planning Tools
- Crediting Handbook: vegetable and whole grain ideas (pg 67-69)

KEY TASKS

- ✓ Select a timeframe for cycle menus, which repeat on a regular basis, saving time and money.
- ✓ Identify any days of the menu that will differ such as holidays or special events.
- ✓ Use USDA standardized recipes that have been successful in the past, but be willing to try new ones.
- ✓ Use foods that are in season. Adjust seasonal menus to plan for the items that will be at peak quality.
- ✓ Identify what is needed for children with special dietary requests.

2. Build Menus

TIME FRAME

One month or more ahead of the time you will serve the menu.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- CACFP Meal Pattern Chart
- CACFP Crediting Handbook
- Food Buying Guide
- Food Buying Guide Calculator
- MDE Menu Template
- CACFP Menu Planning Guide (Wisconsin)

KEY TASKS

- ✓ Select the main dish, which will be the central focus of a meal. Provide a variety of main dishes to minimize repetition.
- ✓ Select other meal components that complement the main dish and include all required food components for the CACFP meal pattern.
- ✓ Plan meals with a variety of colors, textures, flavors, and food temperatures.
- ✓ Consider the amount of prep time along with staff capabilities for each item that will be made from scratch.
- ✓ Determine quantity to purchase and prepare. Create shopping or ordering lists.

3. Review & Evaluate

TIME FRAME

Ongoing process.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Crediting Handbook: Menu Planning Checklist (pg. 65)
- USDA Try-Day Taste Testing Ballot

KEY TASKS

- ✓ Verify that menus meet CACFP meal pattern requirements, contain creditable foods, and are reimbursable.
- ✓ Review menus to ensure: variety, contrast in texture and flavor, color contrast, and eye appeal.
- ✓ Gather feedback from children and adults. Consider recommendations if possible.
- ✓ Review cost of menu items to balance higher cost items with lower cost items.
- ✓ Keep notes of any modifications that are needed for the next menu cycle.