

MENU PLANNING TIPS

Student Acceptance - Planning menus requires special care. Food service personnel must not only plan meals that meet meal requirements, but they must also strive to provide meals with food items that are acceptable to children. Only then will they consume the whole meal, and only then will they receive the full nutritional value of the meal offered to them.

To achieve this goal, food service personnel must know the preferences of their customers. Two ways to learn children's choices are to have tasting panels for children and to have children help plan menus. Another way to evaluate acceptance of each menu item is to review past food production records and food waste each time specific items are served. If you observe over time that an item is unpopular, try revising the recipe or using a different brand of a processed product before substituting more popular but less nutritious foods.

Food service personnel can rely on their experience and knowledge in order to maximize both acceptability and nutrition in the meals they provide.

Offering Choices - Try to offer as many choices as possible of different foods within each food component group. Offering choices give children more of an opportunity to select foods they will eat and recognizes the fact that not all children have the same tastes. It also increases the chances that children will select a full meal. For instance, if three or four fruits and vegetables were offered, it is more likely that children will select and eat at least two. One of the goals of the NSLP and the SBP is to encourage the consumption of a wide variety of nutritious foods in well-balanced, healthy meals. Offering carefully planned choices can result in increased customer satisfaction, improved nutritional awareness and less food waste.

Practical Ideas - The following suggestions are tips to make your lunches and breakfasts complete and more attractive to children. The success of your lunch and breakfast programs depends on how appealing children find the meals. The attractiveness of meals is particularly important in areas where OvS has been implemented, in order to ensure that children will take meals that meet minimum requirements for reimbursement.

Regulations allow the meat/meat alternate to be served in the main dish **or** in the main dish and in one other menu item. However, it is easier to determine that a complete component has been taken if the main dish contains the full serving of a meat/meat alternate. If a menu is occasionally planned in which the meat/meat alternate is split between menu items (e.g., a soup and sandwich combination), serve the two items together.

In RCCIs that **do not** offer choices of meat/meat alternates each day, it is recommended that no one form of meat (e.g., ground, sliced) be served more than three times a week. For example, four items made with ground beef, such as tacos, spaghetti with meat sauce, hamburgers and meatloaf should not be served in a single week. Likewise, no one form of meat alternate foods (cheese, cooked dry beans or peas, eggs, peanut butter or other nut/seed butters, peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, and seeds) should be served more than three times a week. Four cheese items such as grilled cheese sandwich, macaroni and cheese, cheese pizza and cheese lasagna should not be served in a single week. Greater variety can increase the appeal, and therefore consumption, of meals.

RCCIs that **do** offer choices of meat/meat alternates each day may serve any one meat alternate or form of meat as frequently as good menu planning practices allow. Remember to consider meats such as ground turkey in order to add variety to and lower the fat content of the meals served.

Plan only full servings of grains/breads. If there are two menu items containing this component, be sure each of these items contains a full serving. For example, if chicken with rice and a dinner roll is served, each should provide

a full serving. Either the rice or the roll can then be counted as a grains/breads item. Otherwise, if the rice does not contain a full serving and the child opts for the rice, but not the dinner roll, the meal may be incomplete.

Studies indicate children consume more fruit, raw vegetables and potato dishes than other cooked vegetables (for example, children take more orange wedges than cooked spinach). Plan larger portions of these foods and smaller portions of cooked vegetables. Use fresh, canned, frozen and dried fruits interchangeably.

You can look to different kinds of whole grain breads to enhance your breakfast program:

- Use a variety of hot breads (e.g., cornbread made with “whole corn”) and different kinds of muffins and biscuits.
- Try breakfast rolls made with bulgur, rolled wheat or oats.
- Include breakfast sandwiches, pancakes, waffles and French toast as additional menu options.
- Serve hot cereals or use dry cereals, including those made from whole-grain wheat, corn, rice, and oats. Try to avoid cereals with high sugar content.

Coordinating Breakfast and Lunch Menus

- Avoid repeating the same food items for different meals during the day. For example, try not to serve orange juice at breakfast and again at lunch. All meals served should consist of complementary food items, so that the end result will be well-balanced meals for the day.
- Be sure the equipment you use for the preparation of breakfast will not interfere with what you need to prepare for lunch.
- Schedule personnel carefully so they can be effective and efficient.