

MEAL PLANNING FOR PRESCHOOLERS

Meal planning is a “must” for individuals and organizations providing child care, but is also recommended for parents to do at home. Planning in advance makes it easier to fit healthy eating into your busy day.

How does meal planning benefit preschoolers?

- ensures preschoolers get a variety of different foods and nutrients
- provides preschoolers with the security and comfort of regular meals and snacks
- provides preschoolers with meals they will enjoy
- provides meals that contribute to healthy growth and development and a healthy weight

Why should you have a meal plan?

- to provide healthy meals and snacks that are well spaced throughout the day
- to reduce repetition in food choices
- to get organized, plan your shopping list and avoid last minute trips to the store or fast food shop
- to save time - by looking at your menu you can see which foods can be prepared in advance



Parents and child care providers share the responsibility of helping children eat well and should all be involved in meal planning and enjoying meals with their children.

HOW TO USE THE “HEALTHY START FOR LIFE - EATING WELL TOGETHER MEAL PLANNER”

Use the meal planner to plan a weeks worth of meals and snacks. A daily plan should include three meals and two to three snacks to help keep preschoolers satisfied. Snacks should include foods that might be missed at meals - for example vegetables and fruit. To avoid spoiling a child's appetite serve snacks 1 to 2 hours before meal times. Meals and snacks should include foods from each of the four food groups in [*Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*](#):

Tip: If you are new to meal planning or don't have a lot of time, start with planning your main meals each week.

For each meal:

- Include a serving from at least 3 different food groups
- Choose a serving from the *grain products* group (e.g. pasta)
- Add a serving from the *vegetables and fruit* group (e.g. tomato sauce)
- Select a serving from the *milk and alternatives* group (e.g. milk)
- Add a serving of meat, poultry, fish, eggs or meat alternatives such as beans, lentils or tofu (e.g. chicken)

For snacks:

- Include a serving from at least 2 different food groups.
- Choose nutritious snack foods such as vegetables, fruit, breads, cereals, milk, cheese, yogurt, meat or meat alternatives.
- Keep juice to one serving per day (125-175 mL or 4-6 oz.). Serve water when children are thirsty.
- Avoid sticky, sweet foods such as dried fruit and candy, which can stick to the teeth and cause cavities (unless children brush their teeth right after).

To help preschoolers enjoy your meals:

- Involve them in the planning.
- Choose foods that are easy to eat and suited to their personal and cultural preferences.
- Choose foods that can be served separately on a plate more often than mixed dishes.
- Include some finger foods.
- Use child-size servings.
- Present food in attractive, fun and interesting ways. Use foods of different colours, shapes, and flavours.

What else should you keep in mind?

- Introduce variety by including some "new" foods in small amounts.
- Limit low-nutrient foods that are high in salt, fat, sugar or caffeine (e.g. chips, chocolate, candies and pop).
- Balance higher fat foods with lower fat foods. For example, avoid having higher fat choices such as pepperoni pizza, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets all the same week. When higher fat choices are served balance them with more vegetables and fruit.
- Be aware of food allergies and keep allergy-causing foods (e.g. peanut butter, nuts, shellfish, etc.) off the menu if preparing foods for allergic children.
- Be aware of foods that can cause choking such as hot dogs, grapes, raw vegetables, chunky peanut butter, and nuts for children under the age of 3. If served, cut wieners/sausages lengthwise into strips, then cut into bite-size pieces; for raw fruit - remove pits, seeds and peels and cut into bite-size pieces; cut grapes in half; for raw vegetables - cut into narrow strips or grate; spread peanut butter thinly; never serve it right off a spoon. Don't serve young children popcorn or hard candies.
- Take advantage of foods on special and keep within your food budget.

MENU PLAN CHECKLIST

Use this to plan your menu and check it again to see if your menu is complete:

- ☐ Includes a variety of foods from each of the four food groups each day.
- ☐ Includes food choices that children will eat and enjoy and are safe to eat.
- ☐ Provides meals with different colours, flavours and textures.
- ☐ Includes *vegetables and fruit* 4 servings per day for children age 2-3 and 5 servings per day for children age 4 to 8. Provides one dark green and one orange vegetable each day. Limit juice to one serving (125-175 mL/4-6 oz) per day.
- ☐ Includes *grain products*: 3 servings per day for children age 2-3 and 4 servings per day for children at 4 to 8. Provides at least half of the grains as whole grains such as bread, buns, or bagels made of 100% whole grains (including the germ), oatmeal and oat cereals, or brown rice.
- ☐ Includes 2 servings of *milk and alternatives* each day. Provides at least 500 mL (2 cups) of milk or fortified soy beverage, if milk is not consumed.
- ☐ Includes the equivalent of 1 serving of meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cooked dried peas, beans or lentils, tofu or peanut butter. Food Guide Servings can be divided into smaller servings (e.g. halves or thirds) and spread throughout the day.
- ☐ Includes nutritious snacks that don't cause cavities. Limits foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt (sodium).

QUICK LINKS FOR PARENTS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Menu Planning & Shopping:

- Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - Health Canada – Health Canada
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html
- Great Food Fast Pantry List – Dietitians of Canada
www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/menuplanner/AppendixB.asp
- Great Food Fast Shopping Tips
www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/menuplanner/AppendixC.asp
- Healthy Start for Life - FAQs
www.dietitians.ca/healthystart/content/resources/faqs.asp
- Menu Magic for Children - A Menu Planning Guide for Child Care with information on the Child and Adult Care Food Program and eight tear-out recipe cards – USDA Team Nutrition
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/menumagic.html

Recipes:

- Better Food for Kids - Your Essential Guide to Nutrition For All Children Age 2 to 6 by Joanne Saab, RD and Diana Kalnins, RD - The Hospital for Sick Children (Robert Rose, 2002)
- Cook Great Food by Dietitians of Canada (Robert Rose, 2002)
www.dietitians.ca/english/kitchen/recipes/cgf_recipes.html
- Great Food Fast by Bev Callaghan RD and Lynn Roblin RD - Dietitians of Canada (Robert Rose, 2000)
www.dietitians.ca/english/kitchen/recipes/gff_recipes.html
- Simply Great Food
www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/cookbooks/simplygreatfood.asp

Food Allergies & Food Safety

Anaphylaxis Canada www.anaphylaxis.ca
Food Allergy Network www.foodallergy.org
Food Allergies and Intolerances www.caringforkids.cps.ca/eating/FoodAllergies.htm
Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education www.canfightbac.org/en
Canadian Food Inspection Agency www.inspection.gc.ca/

Use this "sample meal plan" as a guide for planning your own meals and snacks. Adapt it to suit personal and cultural food preferences.

MEAL	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
BREAKFAST	French toast made with whole wheat bread Canned peaches Milk	Oatmeal Orange sections Milk	Cold whole grain cereal Apple or Grape Juice Milk	Bagel with peanut butter or light cream cheese Orange or apple juice Milk	Cold whole grain cereal Fresh or dried fruit Milk	Pancakes Fresh or frozen berries Syrup Milk	Scrambled or poached eggs Whole wheat toast and jam Apple Juice
SNACK	Apple Cheese Whole wheat crackers Water	Bagel half with light cream cheese Grape Juice	<u>Banana Berry Wake Up Shake</u> <u>Pumpkin Raisin Muffins</u>	Graham Crackers Applesauce Water	<u>Sunny Orange Shake</u> Whole wheat crackers	Dry cereal mix Orange Juice	Orange slices or banana Milk
LUNCH	Chicken or turkey with shredded lettuce and carrots in a pita or tortilla wrap Melon slices Milk	Tuna or egg salad sandwich Raw vegetables with Caesar or Ranch salad dressing dip Milk	Carrot or Vegetable Soup Hummus or Peanut Butter on Pita Bread Triangles Pudding Milk	Macaroni and cheese Raw or steamed carrots and broccoli. Oatmeal Raisin Cookie Milk	Chili (vegetarian or meat) Cornmeal muffins or whole wheat toast Frozen Yogurt Milk	Ham and cheese or peanut butter sandwich Fresh or canned fruit Milk	Ground beef or bean burritos stuffed with corn, lettuce cheese and salsa. Apple Oatmeal Cookies Milk
SNACK	<u>Big-Batch Bran Muffins</u> Apple or Orange Juice	Graham crackers Fresh or canned peaches or pears	Whole wheat crackers Kiwi halves Water	Banana Yogurt Water	Bran, pumpkin or oatmeal muffin Apple or grape juice	Raw Vegetables and breadsticks Caesar or Ranch Dressing Dip	Banana Bread Milk
SUPPER	Broiled Ham Steak Scalloped Potatoes Frozen Corn Fresh or canned fruit Oatmeal cookie Milk	<u>Hot 'n' Spicy Turkey Burgers</u> with <u>Sweet Potato "Fries"</u> Sherbet or frozen yogurt Milk	<u>Veggie, Beef and Pasta Bake</u> Mixed dark green lettuce salad Whole grain bread or rolls Milk	BBQ Chicken Fresh canned or frozen corn Whole wheat bread Milk	<u>Polynesian Pork Kebabs</u> Couscous or rice Apple Crisp Milk	<u>Quick Steamed Fish Fillets with Potatoes and Asparagus</u> Banana Bread Milk	Baked chicken with pasta and prepared tomato sauce Steamed Green Beans Ice cream Water

*Underlined recipes © Dietitians of Canada, 2000

Copy this meal planner and post it on your fridge or bulletin board to keep track of the meals you plan to serve each week.





Remember to:

- Include a variety of food from each of the 4 food groups every day.
- Include foods from at least 3 food groups for each meal.
- Include foods from at least 2 food groups for each snack.

- Prepare foods safely.
- Enjoy eating meals together as a family.
- Eating well and keeping active go hand-in-hand.

WEEK _____

MEAL	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
BREAKFAST							
SNACK							
LUNCH							
SNACK							
SUPPER							

VEGETABLES & FRUIT	GRAIN PRODUCTS	MILK AND ALTERNATIVES	MEAT & ALTERNATIVES	OTHER FOODS
 <p>A Food Guide Serving is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 medium size vegetable or fruit • 125 mL (1/2 cup) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit • 250 mL (1 cup) green salad • 125 mL (1/2 cup) juice 	 <p>A Food Guide Serving is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice bread • 30 g cold cereal • 175 mL (3/4 cup) hot cereal • 1/2 cup pasta, couscous or rice • 1/2 bagel, pita, tortilla or bun 	 <p>A Food Guide Serving is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250 mL (1 cup) milk • 50 g (1 1/2 oz) cheese • 175 g (3/4 cup) yogurt • 250 mL of fortified soy beverages 	 <p>A Food Guide Serving is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 g (2 1/2 oz) or 125 mL (1/2 cup) cooked meat, fish or poultry • 2 eggs • 175 mL (3/4 cup) cooked beans, lentils, tofu or hummus • 30 mL (2 Tbsp) peanut butter 	<p>Limit foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt such as cakes, pastries, chocolate and candies, cookies and granola bars, doughnuts and muffins, ice cream, frozen desserts, French fries, potato chips, nachos and other salty snacks, fruit flavoured drinks, soft drinks, sports and energy drinks and sweetened hot and cold beverages.</p>