

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Menu Planning Solutions

Meal planning is an important step in helping you and your family achieve a healthier diet. It has been shown that people who plan their meals tend to eat healthier than those who do not. Planning can be made easier with the following suggestions.

Planning a menu can help:

1. Balance your meals to meet your nutrient needs -

Plan daily meals using Canada's Food Guide. With a planned menu you will be able to see if you are meeting your daily needs for vitamins and minerals. A balanced meal includes foods from at least three of the four food groups.



2. Save money and meet your budget - Use weekly grocery store flyers to take advantage of items on sale. Plan your menu around specials and include foods that can be used for leftovers.

Front page specials are usually a good buy. A shopping list will help you avoid impulse purchases so you can stay within your budget. If you plan before you go grocery shopping, you will know what you have on hand and what you will need.



3. Save time and effort- With planned meals, you will not spend time looking in your fridge or freezer to decide what to cook. You will also save time with less trips to the grocery store. Planning helps you make good use of leftovers. These can all help cut down on cooking time and food costs!



Tips for Successful Menu Planning

- Set some time aside each week to plan your menu
- Plan to include three meals and small healthy snacks between meals daily. A healthy snack should consist of at least two of the four food groups
- Check the foods you already have in your cupboard, fridge and freezer
- Find out what foods are "on special" at the grocery store
- Use Canada's Food Guide and *The Menu Planner* and to help with your planning. You can get a copy of these tools through Health Connection, 1-800-361-5653
- Build the main part of your meal around vegetables and fruits, and grain products. Use small amounts of meat, poultry, fish and meat and alternatives such as beans and lentils
- Choose foods in a variety of colours, shapes, textures and flavours. Try new recipes regularly for variety
- Try different ways to cook foods such as grilling, stir-frying and steaming

Menu Planning Checklist



Evaluate your menu using this checklist.

Does your menu include...?	Yes	No
1. A variety of foods from each of the four food groups?		
2. The recommended number of food guide servings?		
3. Appropriate food guide serving sizes?		
4. Three main meals and two to three snacks?		
5. A variety of colours, flavours and textures?		
6. At least one dark green vegetable each day, such as asparagus, broccoli, spinach and green peas?		
7. At least one orange vegetable or fruit each day, such as carrots, squash, sweet potato, cantaloupe, mango, and papaya.		
8. Whole grain products such as whole grain breads, cereals and pastas?		
9. At least 2 cups (500 mL) of milk?		
10. Lower-fat milk products (skim, 1% or 2% milk, low-fat cheeses and low-fat yogurts)?		
11. Leaner cuts of meat (trimmed of fat), poultry and/or meat alternatives like lentils, beans and tofu?		
12. At least 2 food guide servings of fish each week, such as salmon, trout, or sardines?		
13. Food choices that you and your family enjoy and that fit within your budget and lifestyle?		

If you answered “no” to any of the above questions, consider making changes to your menu plan.