



Meal Planning: Information for Parents

Planning nutritious meals is easy! Just follow these simple tips.

Plan for 2-3 Servings per Day of Dairy: Eating two to three servings a day of dairy foods, depending on caloric needs, such as low-fat or non-fat milk, yogurt and cheese, is a deliciously easy way for families to meet their daily calcium needs. Research shows that dairy foods are important contributors of multiple essential nutrients in the diet of Americans.ⁱ Further, moderate evidence shows that intake of milk and milk products is linked to improved bone health, especially in children and adolescents.ⁱⁱ

Let the MyPlate Model be Your Guide: Hot or cold, convenience or scratch, everyday foods or new ones your family hasn't tried — use ChooseMyPlate.gov for planning healthy meals. Include foods from all the food groups, and choose a variety of foods from each group. A variety of foods is the best way to help ensure your family gets the many nutrients they need each day.

Plan Ahead: It avoids the question, "What's for dinner tonight?" and increases the likelihood that meals are nutritious. There's no magic formula. Choose what works best for you — one day, a few days or a week at a time. The key is knowing your family's schedule and including foods that that can be prepared in the time available. Use your plan for your grocery list.

Think Convenience: Take advantage of the variety of nutrient-rich and convenient foods available. For busy nights, plan to pick up a whole grain pizza with low-fat cheese and lots of veggies, or a roast chicken or entree on the way home. Prepare a salad, cut up some fruit, cook some pasta or slice some bread, pour some milk and dinner is served!

Keep a Well-Stocked Pantry and Fridge: Put nutritious meals together in a hurry when there's a last-minute schedule change or you didn't get around to planning.

Save Time (and Money) by Using Leftovers: Many foods taste just as good, if not better, the second time around. So be sure to incorporate leftovers into your menu. Not only does it cut time in the kitchen, it's a great way to stretch your food dollar.

ⁱ Keast, D. Fulgoni, V. Nicklas T. O'neil, C. "Food Sources of Energy and Nutrients among Children in the United States: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2003–2006." *Nutrients* 5.1 (2013): 283-301.

<https://www2.teamdairy.com/DairyResearchInstitute/RegulatoryAffairsSubmissionSite/FuelUptoPlay60Tools/Shared%20Documents/Keast%20et%20al%20-%20DRI%20NHANES%20nutrient%20sources%20kids%20-Jan%202013.pdf>

ⁱⁱ "Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010." *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp>



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