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PLANNING YOUR FAMILY MEALS

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Planning meals means knowing the kind and amount of food needed by each family member. Planning also means considering preferences, habits, season, income, storage and preparation facilities and the time and energy you have for meal preparation. Planning means thinking ahead!

Food guide

The basic four food groups are a good place to begin in meeting your family's nutritional needs. Food and nutrition scientists have translated the nutrient needs of people and the nutritive values of food into an easy-to-use guide that includes many kinds of meals. To use this guide, give your family the number of servings suggested from each group daily, and then choose additional foods to round out meals and satisfy appetites. Although additional foods may not fall in the four food groups, they are important for variety, interest and meeting energy needs.

There is enough variety within a food group to account for individual food preferences and different food budgets. Some foods in each group are less expensive; others are more expensive.

Menu planning

After determining your family's daily food needs (see Table 1), you must consider when they will eat these foods. Mealtimes will probably follow a daily schedule. The kind of meal you eat also may remain fairly constant. For example, some families find that a large breakfast, light lunch and a main meal in the evening best fit their schedules. Other families find a light breakfast, large noon meal, light evening meal and a later snack best suit their situations. Because activities are often different on weekends and holidays, your family may have one meal pattern for weekdays and another pattern for weekends and holidays.

Any pattern that suits your family is good if it

- provides regular meals at regular intervals and
- includes a variety of foods from each of the four food groups.

Using a meal pattern helps insure the variety of foods needed for a good diet. Table 2 shows how a meal pattern becomes a menu and how the menu compares with the basic four food groups.

The estimated cost of the menu in Table 2 is \$4 (prices typical of Washington, D.C., June, 1970) for a family of four with two school children.

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Adults in the family may not drink four glasses of milk per day if they choose coffee or another beverage. Also, some foods such as apple pie contribute only enough fruit to count as half a serving in the vegetable-fruit group. When evaluating the total daily score for your menus, remember that some family members will not eat all of the food listed and some foods may contribute fractions of a serving.

Enjoyable meals

"That looks good enough to eat!" We all decide whether or not we want to eat something from the way it looks, tastes and smells. Contrast and variety make meals more appealing to the senses. Ask yourself, "Does the meal have a variety of colors, flavors, textures, shapes and temperatures?".

TABLE 1. BASIC FOUR FOOD GROUPS FOR PLANNING FAMILY MEALS

RECOMMENDED SERVING	GS	WHAT COUNTS AS A SERVING*	USES IN FAMILY MEALS				
MEAT GROUP 2 OR MORE		2 TO 3 OUNCES OF LEAN COOKED MEAT, POULTRY OR FISH. Alternates: 1 egg, 1/2 cup cooked dry beans or peas or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter may replace 1/2 serving of meat.	Foods from meat group usually appear of the main dish or as an ingredient in a mai dish, such as soup, stew, salad, casserol or sandwich. Small amounts of two of more foods from the group used during the day can add up to a serving. Eggs used in custards and baked goods count too.				
MILK GROUP CHILD, under 9 CHILD, 9 to 12 TEENAGER ADULT PREGNANT WOMAN NURSING WOMAN	2 TO 3 3 OR MORE 4 OR MORE 2 OR MORE 3 OR MORE 4 OR MORE	ONE 8-OUNCE CUP OF FLUID MILK—whole, skim, buttermilk or evaporated, dry or reconstituted. Alternates: 1-inch cube cheddar-type cheese, 3/3 cup cottage cheese or ice milk or 1 cup ice cream may replace 1/2 cup of fluid milk.	Milk may be served as a bevarage at meals or with snacks. Some may be included on cereals and in preparation of other foods, including soups, main dishes, custards, puddings, baked goods. Cubed or sliced cheese (plain, on crackers or in sandwiches) and ice cream or ice milk (at meals or in between) may replace part of the milk.				
VEGETABLE-FRUIT GROUP 4 OR MORE, INCLUDING: ONE IMPORTANT SOURCE OF VITAMIN C ONE IMPORTANT SOURCE OF VITAMIN A		1/2 CUP OF VEGETABLE OR FRUIT OR A PORTION of 1 medium apple, banana or potato or one-half medium grapefruit or cantaloupe, for example. IMPORTANT SOURCES: Grapefruit, orange, lemon, tangerine (fruit or juice), cantaloupe, guava, honeydew melon, mango, papaya, raw strawberries and watermelon. Asparagus tips, broccoli, brussels sprouts, raw cabbage, collards, green or sweet red peppers, kale, kohlrabi, mustard greens, potatoes and sweetpotatoes cooked in jacket, spinach, tomatoes or their juice and turnip greens. IMPORTANT SOURCES: Dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables and a few fruits, namely apricots, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, chard, collards, cress, kale, mango, persimmon, pumpkin, spinach, sweetpotatoes, turnip greens, other dark-green leaves and winter squash.	Vegetables or fruit are part of most meals. Serve raw and cooked with crisp and soft textures, contrasting strong flavor with mild and sweet with sour for variety in meals. Brighten meals with color. A slice of red tomato, a sprig of dark greens or other colorful vegetables and fruit are used in salads and as side dishes. Serve vegetables in casseroles, stews and soups, along with raw fruits as juices and in desserts such as cobblers, pies or shortcakes. Many families include their vitamin-C food as a citrus fruit or juice or as melon or strawberries (when in season) at breakfast.				
BREAD-CEREAL GROUP 4 OR MORE		COUNT ONLY IF WHOLE-GRAIN OR EN- RICHED: 1 slice of bread or similar serving of baked goods made with whole- grain or enriched flour, 1 ounce ready-to- eat cereal, ½ to ¾ cup cooked cereal, cornmeal, grits, spaghetti, macaroni, noodles or rice.	Foods from this group are served at breakfast as toast, muffins, pancakes or grits and cereals (cooked or ready-to-eat); at lunch and dinner as macaroni, spaghetti, noodles or rice in a casserole or side dish or as any kind of bread or baked dessert such as cake, pastry and cookies. Because breads and cereals are well liked, usually inexpensive and can be served a number of ways, they are used more than four times a day in most households.				
OTHER FOODS AS NEEDED TO ROUND OUT MEALS AND MEET ENERGY REQUIREMENTS		Refined unenriched cereals, flours and products made from them, sugars, butter, margarine, other fats. Try to include some vegetable oil among the fats used.	Some of these items, such as flour, sugar and fats, are recipe ingredients. Some may be added to other foods at the table (sugar on cereals, dressing on salads and spread on bread).				

^{*}Amounts actually served may differ—small for young children, extra large (or seconds) for very active adults or teenagers.

We all like variety and contrast, but we also want combinations that go together. Consider, for example, the old favorite of turkey and dressing with cranberry sauce. The turkey and dressing probably have a mild flavor, golden brown color, smooth moist texture and are served hot. The cranberry sauce is probably tart, bright red, mildly crunchy in texture and served ice cold. Contrasts represented by these two favorites work as complements to each other. Too many foods with strong flavors can make a meal as unappetizing as too few contrasts.

Check your menus for variety in

- color
- flavor
- texture
- shape
- temperature

Limitations

Can you do it? Consider your limitations when planning family meals. How much time can you spend preparing food? What equipment do you have? What equipment can be used at the same time? An oven meal is a great idea only when all the foods can be cooked at the same temperature! Also, how much last minute preparation is involved? The best cooks plan their menus to prepare one dish while another dish is cooking or chilling.

Successful planning

You can do it! By following the steps above, you can plan just-right meals for your family. After planning your meals, ask yourself the following questions.

• Did you use foods from all of the food groups?

TABLE 2. MENN FROM A MEAL PATTERN

Sample Meal Pattern		Servings contributed by a day's menu								
	Sample Menu	Meat		Miłk¹		Fruit- Vegetable		Bread- Cereal		Other
BREAKFAST										
Fruit or juice Main dish ² and/or	Orange juice Oatmeal with milk				1	(orange juice)		(oatmeal)		
cereal with milk	Odimedi With Milk		1/2	(milk)		loice)		(oaimeai)		
Bread	Cinnamon toast						1	(toast)		
Beverage	Non-fat dry milk or coffee		1	(milk)						(coffee)
LUNCH										
Main dish ²	Hard cooked eggs or peanut butter and ielly sandwich	l (egg or peanut butter)								(jelly)
Vegetable or fruit	Celery sticks, banana	boner			1/2	(celery)				(leny)
regerance or men						(banana)				
Bread	Bread (for sandwich)						1	(bread)		
Beverage	Milk (nonfat dry)		- 1	(milk)						
SNACK										
Fruit or cookies	Sugar cookies						1/2	(cookies)		
Beverage	Fruit or soft drink				1	(fruit drink)				(soft drink)
DINNER										
Main dish ²	Fried chicken	1 (chicken)								
Vegetable	Mashed potatoes				1	(potato)				
Vegetable and/or salad	Carrot salad				1	(salad)				
Bread	Bread (enriched)					(-3,00)	1	(bread)		
Dessert	Apple pie				1/2	(pie)				(pie)
Beverage	Milk or coffee		1	(milk)						(coffee)
DAILY SCORE		2 (meat)	31/2	(milk)	6	(fruit- vegetable)	4 1/2	(bread- cereal)	5	(other)
Recommended Servings	(adult)	2 (meat)	2	(milk)	4	(fruit- vegetable)	4	(bread- cereal)		as desired

¹Milk for everyone at least once daily and for children and teens more often. One serving of milk may come from the milk used with other foods such as cereal.

²Usually contains some meat, poultry, fish, egg, dry beans or peas, peanut butter or cheese. It also may contain other foods (noodles, rice, etc.).



- Do your meals have contrast in color, shape, texture, temperature and shape of the food?
- Does the meal fit your budget?
 - Can you prepare the meal in the time you have?
 - Do you have the necessary equipment?
- Did you avoid too many foods requiring last-minute preparation?

If you can answer "yes" to these six questions, you are on the way to good meals three times a day, 1,095 meals a year.

Tables adapted from Your Money's Worth in Foods, Consumer and Food Economics Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, Home and Garden Bulletin No. 183

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