

# Menu Planning Basics

Remember basic menu planning guidelines:

- Include a variety of foods.
- Include familiar foods as well as foods that may be new to students.
- Include different shapes, colors, textures, and temperatures of food.
- Balance higher-cost and lower-cost foods throughout the week.
- Include foods that are in season.
- Include raw and cooked vegetables.
- Consider when fresh foods will arrive and how long they will last.
- Vary the preparation methods in a day's menu so equipment, such as ovens, will not be overloaded.
- Consider delivery times and storage capacities of freezers and refrigerators.
- Remember that cycle menus can be adjusted to allow for holidays, unexpected leftovers, or seasonal produce.

## **Variety is More Than Just the Spice of Life**

Menu variety is important not only for nutritional purposes but also for meal appeal.

Be aware of the colors you are using and avoid using all one color in a day's menu.

Examples of what NOT to do:

DAY 1: white, white... Chicken Potato Wedge Cauliflower Ranch Dressing Banana Half Milk	DAY 2: orange, orange.. BBQ Chicken Macaroni and Cheese Carrots Mandarin Oranges Pumpkin Muffin Milk
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## Steps in Menu Planning

1. Choose a Variety of Entrées: entrées are chosen first because they are the central focus of the meal. Other foods are chosen to compliment the entrée.
  - If multiple entrées are offered, offer a variety of meat/meatless options.
  - Vary types of meats through the week (example to avoid: chicken nuggets, chicken sandwich, and chicken noodle soup all in one week).
  - Balance high-priced menu items with lower cost ones.
  - Balance high-fat menu items with lower fat ones.
2. Choose a Variety of Fruits
  - Offer fresh and canned. A good rule of thumb is to offer fresh fruits at least three times a week.
  - Include a variety of colors: red, orange, green, dark blue/purple, white.
  - Offer whole fruits and cut up fruits to give students a choice.
3. Get the most out of your vegetable colors: yes, students will eat vegetables; quality and variety are an important part of encouraging students to eat veggies.
  - Vary fresh, frozen and canned. Like fruits, fresh vegetables should be offered three times a week at a minimum.
  - Offer plenty of dark green and orange vegetables—these are your super foods, packed full of nutrition.
  - Remember, if you offer a pre-fried vegetable, you need to add an additional non-fried vegetable to the meal to meet the Idaho Nutrition Standards.
  - Don't count condiments as vegetables: most students do not top their sandwiches or burgers off with enough lettuce, tomatoes, or pickles to have them count as a vegetable. On these days offer a vegetable in addition to sandwich toppings.
4. Make all of your desserts count
  - Desserts do not need to be served every day; a dessert is meant to be a special treat.
  - When you do offer a dessert, make it count nutritionally and have all of your desserts include whole grains or fruits or vegetables.
  - Sweet, bright fruit is an excellent dessert option.
5. Check if the menu meets the New Nutrition Standards for School Meals. A menu checklist is provided on CNP's website at [www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/nutritionStandards](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/nutritionStandards). Use this checklist to make sure you meet all of the Idaho Nutrition Standards. After the menu has been planned, double check to make sure it meets the requirements of your menu planning method.