



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

Purchasing **P.02**

Preparing **P.02**



Vegetable of the Month **P.03**

Nutrition Fun Fact **P.03**

Nutrition Tip **P.03**

References **P.04**

## Healthy Meals on a Budget

As a Child and Adult Care Food Program Provider, it is important to use a budget and purchase nutritious foods at an affordable cost. When you plan meals and use a shopping list, you will be most successful in purchasing foods within your budget. Planning, Purchasing, and Preparing are good concepts to use when planning a cycle menu, shopping, and preparing food. Use these strategies when planning healthy meals on a budget.



## Planning

Use cycle menus. Cycle menus are a series of menus planned for a specific period of time. The period of time could be three to four weeks or longer. All foods are different each day. Once you have completed the time frame, or menu cycle you start again with the first week of the cycle menu pattern. Make your grocery list from your menu. You can actually establish an ongoing list of needed items. Aim to include foods high in vitamin A and C, and foods that are iron-rich and high in fiber. Check to see what you have in your storage area that is included on the menu.



## Purchasing

As you go to purchase foods, be sure to eat before you leave home. This way you will not be tempted to buy extra items that are not on your list because you feel hungry. Plan to go only the aisle that have items on your list.

Determine the unit size that will be good for your facility. Compare the unit price from different brands of the same item. You can do this by dividing the item price by the item size. This formula will give you the unit price. You may also be able to see the unit price listed for you on the shelf at the store. Ask yourself if this is something the children will eat, what if I can't use it right away, do I have room to store it, or will it spoil?

When you shop, use stores, or approved vendors that will provide some type of incentive for shopping with them. This way you will receive discounts at check-out, delivery, or points for discounts at a later date. Include coupons for foods you are going to purchase.

Select your cold and frozen items last. Go straight to your facility to put your groceries away. This will help keep your food at safe temperatures. Purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season and from a farmers market may be cost effective as well. Make sure you will use the fresh fruits and vegetables in a timely manner to avoid spoiling. Compare prices of fresh, frozen, canned, and store brands to get the best buy. Be careful with **use by** and **sell by** dates when purchasing and storing. Dating all products and using the first in first out method (FIFO) will help to use food items before they expire.

## Preparing

When preparing your food, consider using foods that will stretch your meals further such as spaghetti or casserole type dishes. Choose foods that can be prepared several different ways. Consider using USDA recipes when preparing your food. Always make sure you prepare creditable meals. You may also consider alternatives such as dried beans and peas to have in place of meat to help curb cost. Easy recipes for using dried beans and peas can be found on the internet at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/recipes-healthy-kids-cookbook-child-care-centers-0>.



Prepare to cook from scratch. This way of cooking can be healthier and cheaper than convenience items. You control what food you purchase as well as the ingredients you use. Remember that convenience food may have a mark-up price. Avoid the added salt and fat that may come with convenience foods. Serve fresh fruits and vegetables often. You and the children can be creative by using cookie cutters to make different shapes or combining different fruits and vegetables to create images or pictures. For additional information please see *NFSMI Food Purchasing for Child Care*.





## Vegetable of the Month Bok Choy

Bok Choy, also known as Chinese cabbage, has been grown in China for over 6,000 years. When purchasing Bok Choy look for those that have firm stalks and leaves that are free of brown spots. It can be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to one week. Wash Bok Choy under cool, running water before serving.

Bok Choy is an excellent source of vitamins A and C and a good source of folate. It is fat free, cholesterol free, and low in sodium. It can be eaten raw or cooked. A few great ways to introduce Bok Choy to young children include serving it with grilled onions, as a substitute for lettuce on a sandwich or in salads; or you can fill the stalks with hummus for a healthy snack

### Nutrition Tip

Purchase and use canned food safely. When you purchase cans make sure they are clean, rust free, undented, and not swollen. Canned food should be stored in a cool, dry place with a stable temperature. Avoid storing cans in areas that are very hot or very cold. Once you open the can, store any unused food in an appropriate container, and place in the refrigerator or freezer. Do not store any food in an open container. When preparing vegetables, heat canned vegetables to a minimum temperature of 140°F. To be sure the food has reached 140°F, check the temperature with a thermometer.

### Nutrition Fact:

Caffeine is considered a stimulant. It has many effects on the body's metabolism, including stimulating the central nervous system. This can make you more alert and give your body a boost of energy. Common sources of caffeine include sodas, coffee, tea, chocolate, and certain medications. Children usually get most of their caffeine from beverages such as soda and tea. However, caffeinated beverages contain empty calories and children who consume too much of them usually do not get the vitamins and minerals they need from healthy food sources.

Consuming too much caffeine can cause numerous side effects. This is especially true for those who are sensitive to caffeine. Side effects can include headaches, upset stomach, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, jitteriness, and nervousness. Caffeine is also a diuretic that can cause children to lose water through frequent urination and result in dehydration.

It is important to understand the negative effects excessive caffeine consumption can have on children's bodies. You can promote a caffeine free child care program and encourage parents to get involved. Serve and encourage parents to serve water, low-fat and fat-free milk, and no sugar added 100% juice.

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