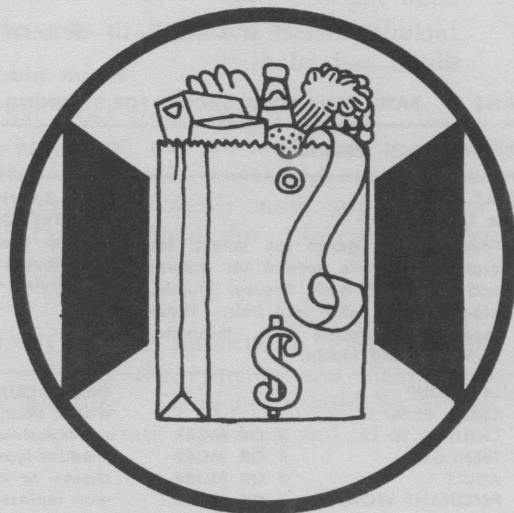


FACT SHEET

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PLANNING YOUR FAMILY MEALS

Marilyn A. Haggard*



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 the guide, plan to include the number of servings suggested from each group daily for your family. 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.

*Extension foods and nutrition specialist, The Texas A&M University System.

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 adaptation of these basic menu patterns to family meals is important to each homemaker. The nutrient needs of family members will vary with

their ages to a limited extent, and with their activities. Listed below are only a few of the ways that meals can be adjusted to meet family needs.

Pregnant family member:

Serve milk as a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack.

Include cheese and milk in desserts, main dishes and salads.

Use vitamin D fortified evaporated, dry skim and whole milk.

Preschoolers:

Serve small servings on a small plate.

Cut food into bite-size pieces.

Avoid highly seasoned foods.

TABLE 1. BASIC FOUR FOOD GROUPS FOR PLANNING FAMILY MEALS

| RECOMMENDED SERVINGS | WHAT COUNTS AS A SERVING* | USES IN FAMILY MEALS |
|---|--|--|
| <p>MEAT GROUP 2 OR MORE Foods in this group are valued for protein, which is needed for growth and repair of body tissues, muscle, organs, blood, skin and hair. These foods also provide iron, thiamine, riboflavin and niacin.</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>Foods from meat group usually appear as the main dish or as an ingredient in a main dish, such as soup, stew, salad, casserole or sandwich. Small amounts of two or more foods from the group used during the day can add up to a serving. Eggs used in custards and baked goods count too.</p> |
| <p>MILK GROUP CHILD, under 9 2 TO 3 CHILD, 9 to 12 3 OR MORE TEENAGER 4 OR MORE ADULT 2 OR MORE PREGNANT WOMAN 3 OR MORE NURSING WOMAN 4 OR MORE Milk is the leading source of calcium, which is needed for strong bones and teeth. It also provides high quality protein, riboflavin, Vitamin A and many other nutrients.</p> | <p>ONE 8-OUNCE CUP OF FLUID MILK— whole, skim, buttermilk or evaporated, dry or reconstituted. Alternates: 1-inch cube cheddar-type cheese, 2/3 cup cottage cheese or ice milk or 1 cup ice cream may replace 1/2 cup of fluid milk.</p> | <p>Milk may be served as a beverage 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.</p> |
| <p>VEGETABLE-FRUIT GROUP 4 OR MORE, INCLUDING: ONE IMPORTANT SOURCE OF VITAMIN C Vitamin C is needed for healthy gums and to help fight infection. ONE IMPORTANT SOURCE OF VITAMIN A Vitamin A is needed for growth, normal vision and healthy condition of skin and other body surfaces.</p> | <p>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 sweet-potatoes 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.</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>BREAD-CEREAL GROUP 4 OR MORE Foods in this group furnish worthwhile amounts of protein, iron, several of the B-vitamins and food energy.</p> | <p>COUNT ONLY IF WHOLE-GRAIN OR ENRICHED: 1 slice of bread or similar serving of baked goods made with whole-grain or enriched flour, 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal, 1/2 to 3/4 cup cooked cereal, cornmeal, grits, spaghetti, macaroni, noodles or rice.</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>OTHER FOODS AS NEEDED TO ROUND OUT MEALS AND MEET ENERGY REQUIREMENTS</p> | <p>Refined unenriched cereals, flours and products made from them, sugars, butter, margarine, other fats. Try to include some vegetable oil among the fats used.</p> | <p>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).</p> |

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

Schoolage Children:

Increase serving size with age to meet nutrient and calorie needs.

Encourage the schoolage child to eat breakfast in order to think, learn and play better.

Serve nutritious snacks such as milk shakes, fruit or cheese.

Teenagers:

Provide larger servings for teenage boys.

Serve nutritious snacks such as milk shakes, fruit or cheese.

Older Adults:

Use fewer rich and fatty foods.

Serve frequent small meals rather than three large meals, or reserve part of the family meal for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack.

Include milk in meals and snacks.

Serve an easily digested meal at night.

Serve fewer calories if activities are reduced.

Overweight family members:

Use skim milk in cooking and for drinking.

Trim fat from meat and prepare meat without added fat.

Bake, boil or broil foods.

Serve low starch vegetables.

Serve fruit as a snack or dessert.

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. Consider foods for color, flavor, texture, form, temperature and variety.

Why is color so important? Pleasing colors in meals stimulate the appetite and make eating a greater pleasure. Garnishes should be simple, as well as appropriate in flavor and color.

TABLE 2. MENU FROM A MEAL PATTERN

| Sample Meal Pattern | Sample Menu | Servings contributed by a day's menu | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Meat | Milk ¹ | Fruit-Vegetable | Bread-Cereal | Other |
| BREAKFAST | | | | | | |
| Fruit or juice | Orange juice | | | 1 (orange juice) | | |
| Main dish ² and/or cereal with milk | Oatmeal with milk | | ½ (milk) | | 1 (oatmeal) | |
| 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 jelly sandwich | 1 (egg or peanut butter) | | | | (jelly) |
| Vegetable or fruit | Celery sticks, banana | | | ½ (celery) 1 (banana) | | |
| Bread | Bread (for sandwich) | | | | 1 (bread) | |
| Beverage | Milk (nonfat dry) | | 1 (milk) | | | |
| SNACK | | | | | | |
| Fruit or cookies | Sugar cookies | | | | ½ (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) | | | | 1 (bread) | |
| Dessert | Apple pie | | | ½ (pie) | | (pie) |
| Beverage | Milk or coffee | | 1 (milk) | | | (coffee) |
| DAILY SCORE | | 2 (meat) | 3½ (milk) | 6 (fruit-vegetable) | 4½ (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.).

Food must have flavor for appetite appeal. Bland foods complement tangy foods. Avoid having more than one strong-flavored food at a meal.

Use spices and herbs to enhance the natural flavors in foods. They should blend with, enhance or complement the flavor of the food.

Texture means the crispness, crunchiness, hardness, softness, smoothness or chewiness of a food. Meals may be monotonous when foods are all smooth or all crisp. A contrast of textures give a meal personality.

For more interesting meals, combine foods of different sizes, shapes and proportions.

Temperature contrast within a meal is essential, regardless of weather. In warm weather, a good menu will include at least one hot food; in cold weather, crisp salads offer contrast for the hot foods served. Generally, lukewarm foods have lukewarm appeal.

Meals are pleasing when a variety of foods is offered in each menu.

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

Set aside a time and place for planning the week's menus. This makes shopping easy and you can make better use of leftovers.

The best tool for planning is a shopping list. Separate the groceries from the other items on the list. Check staples regularly and keep a good supply of canned and frozen foods on hand. Make a shopping list from your menus and buy for the week, provided you have enough storage space in your refrigerator, freezer and cabinets. You may need to buy milk and bread more often.

Plan your time, money and energy to save unnecessary spending. With pre-planned menus, you can make use of good buys, seasonal foods and less expensive cuts of meat. Good planning results in less food wasted.

Plan meals so that you will have time for other things besides preparing meals every day.

Plan to save your energy. Well-organized homemakers who seem to prepare meals with little effort have a plan.

Do not try to do more than one difficult recipe at a time. It is wise to try out a new recipe for your family before preparing it for guests.

Plan meals to feature one food, usually the main dish. With the main dish in mind, it will be easier to plan the remainder of the menu.

Plan to include foods that can be prepared ahead of time—the day before or hours before the meal is to be served. A menu that has too many last minute details, such as broiling a steak, mashing potatoes and preparing a sauce for vegetables, produces a hurried, frenzied cook.

This menu results in a calmer cook: pot roast with potatoes and carrots, peach and cottage cheese salad, hot rolls and cookies with sherbet.

Most Americans are time conscious; however, time limitation is not a valid excuse for unappetizing meals. Many convenience foods are available. They are time-savers and also provide good nutrition.

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?
- Does the meal have contrast in color, flavor, 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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