



Menu Planning and Meal Ideas

Below is the list of ideas shared by attendees during the 2023 CACFP Training Meal Planning and Meal Ideas session. We hope you are inspired by many of the ideas.

When menu planning, remember, all foods served to meet CACFP meal pattern requirements must be creditable and amounts served must meet [CACFP meal pattern minimum serving sizes \(CACFP Adult Day Care Meal Pattern\)](#).

Some of the meal ideas shared during the session include commercially prepared / store-bought combination foods and processed meat/meat alternates. These items require a Child Nutrition (CN) Label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS) to credit the item to the CACFP meal pattern.

Homemade dishes with two or more components and/or other ingredients require a recipe to show how the dish meets the CACFP meal pattern (i.e., how much to serve to each participant, how the amount served meets CACFP meal pattern requirements, and whether additional foods must be served as part of the meal to meet the minimum amounts for each component). See the [CACFP Training Spotlight: Recipes for Foods Prepared From Scratch](#) for information.

VARIETY AND CONTRAST

What are some ways to add variety, color, contrast, and texture, etc. to menus?

- Varied vegetables (raw versus cooked)
- Make the foods of different colors
- Crackers with soup*
- Celery in casseroles
- Different colors
- Different textures
- Different shapes (use cookie cutters)
- Add vegetables to the main dish
- Use spices for color and flavor
- Use garnishes
- Be aware of how cut impacts taste
- Fruit salads
- Color milk (e.g., green milk for St. Patrick's Day)
- Serve chicken tenders* in different ways, i.e., in a wrap, on a bun, in a salad
- Serve a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Prepare foods that are liked the most with new items
- Always serve a colorful fruit or vegetable
- Pasta salad with lots of colorful vegetables
- Use a variety of condiments

VEGETARIAN

What vegetarian meals (meat alternates) do you currently serve? Or what vegetarian meals can you think of that could be served?

- Cheese Quesadillas
- Vegetarian Lasagna (Cheese, Cottage Cheese and/or Ricotta Cheese as meat alternate)
- Cheese Sandwiches / Grilled Cheese
- Red Beans And Rice
- Lentil Soup
- Tofu, Orange Tofu, BBQ Tofu, Lemon Baked Tofu
- Cheese, Cottage Cheese, String Cheese
- Black Beans, Chick Peas (Garbanzo Beans)

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- Fiesta Beans (Mixed Beans with Salsa, Heated)
- Hummus with Pita Chips
- Pasta Salads and/or Lettuce Salads (add beans, cheese, cottage cheese, tofu, or egg to salads for the meat alternate)
- Black Bean Salad
- Cheese Pizza*
- Vegetable Chili (beans as the meat alternate)
- Vegan Burger*, Veggie Burger *
- Lentil Spaghetti (*Pasta made of 100% bean/legume flour(s) may credit as a meat alternate or vegetable but not both, in the same meal. (1/2 cup cooked pasta = 2 oz m/ma). To credit as a meat alternate, 100%*)

bean/legume flours must be served with another 0.25 oz of visible meat or meat alternate).

- Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches
- Avocado toast
- Ants on a Log (Celery, Nut/Seed Butter, Raisins/Craisins)
- Eggs, Scrambled Eggs, Egg Bake
- Cheese Quesadillas*
- Macaroni and Cheese*
- Nuts and Seeds, Nut/Seed butters
- Hummus
- Greek Yogurt
- Cheesy Bread Sticks*
- Bean and Cheese Burrito*

MULTICULTURAL MEALS

What are some cultural and ethnic meals your program incorporates into its menus?

- Chickpea Curry
- Arroz Con Pollo
- Winter Squash Pork (Midwest version of Kabocha Pork)
- Shoyu Chicken
- Orange Chicken
- Sweet and Sour Chicken
- Egg Tacos
- Teriyaki Chicken
- Salsa
- Chicken Curry
- Taco Tater Tot Casserole
- Chicken Alfredo
- Gumbo
- Enchiladas
- Mashed Potatoes on Top of Sliced Dogs
- Tacos / Nachos (Beef, Cheese, Sour Cream (*sour cream is not a creditable food item but can be served as a condiment*))
- Collard Greens
- Red Beans and Rice
- BBQ Chicken and Cabbage
- Fajitas
- Tostados
- Stir Fry
- Lasagna*
- Chicken Parmesan
- Ravioli
- Upside-Down Chicken and Vegetables
- Chicken Chop Suey
- Greens and Dressing
- Chicken Borscht
- Spanish Rice
- Yams
- Teriyaki Chicken
- Meatloaf
- Chicken Lo Mein
- Soul Food
- Grits

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TIME SAVING / QUICK MEALS

How do you save time when preparing meals? What are some easy, quick meals made at your program?

- Prepare double the amount of an item at one time and freeze for future
- Brown meat on free time
- Casseroles
- Canned meats
- Frozen vegetables and frozen fruits
- Meal prep the day before / In Advance / Work Ahead
- Have a list of easy meals available
- Soups
- Use appliances: Crockpot, Air Fryer, Robot- Coupe
- Avoiding casserole / assembled items
- Precut sliced apples and put into bags
- Purchase mixed fruit pre-cut / pre-mixed
- Use pre-mixed salads
- Serve easy to make items that require minimal time: Chicken Nuggets*, Hot dogs, Fries, Corn Dogs*, Hamburgers*, Fish Sticks*, Chicken Patties*, Pizza*
- Pasta
- DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Lunchables
- Spaghetti
- Enchilada Skillet
- Sandwiches (Sub Sandwiches, Ham and Cheese Sandwiches)
- Yogurt
- Cereal
- Chicken
- Waffles
- Egg Bakes
- Tacos
- Breakfast Burritos*
- Finger Food Friday

AWARD WINNING MEALS

What are some favorite meals or snacks your program makes?

- Thai Curry
- BBQ Chicken over Rice with Black Beans and Corn
- Pizza*
- Burgers*
- Hot Dogs
- Chicken Alfredo
- Macaroni and Cheese*
- Stir Fry (Chicken and Vegetables)
- Chicken Parmesan Bake
- Sloppy Joes
- Toast with Jam
- Tater Tot Casserole
- Croissants
- Rice Chicken Cream Mushroom Soup
- Baked Chicken
- Homemade Pizza
- French Toast and Sausage
- Baked Ziti
- Disassembled Wraps
- Meatloaf
- Grilled Cheese and Soup*
- Crack Chicken
- Spaghetti
- Chicken Noodle Soup
- Tacos
- Pancakes
- French Toast Sticks
- Smoothies
- Soft Pretzels with Cheese
- Nachos
- Mozzarella rollups with tortilla
- Ants on a Log
- Chicken Nuggets*

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- Mexican Tortilla Casserole
- Meatballs* and Mashed Potatoes
- Cheesy Chicken and Rice
- Anything with Alfredo
- Pulled Pork
- Homemade pizza participants help make
- Mandarin Chicken and Rice
- Burrito Bowls
- Mashed Potatoes
- Crackers and Sausage
- Pot Roast
- Totchos (Nachos made with tater tots)

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

What are creative ways your program prepares fruits and vegetables to make them exciting, tasty, etc.? Or what creative ways can you think of?

- Serve with Yogurt, Hummus, Dip and/or Condiments (Ranch, Cream Cheese, Mustards, Nut/Seed Butter Dip)
- Add seasonings
- Cut veggie and fruits dip size
- Red Pepper Chicken Alfredo
- Smaller Versions of Veggies (i.e., mini peppers, baby carrots)
- Slice vegetables thin
- Serve whole size peppers
- Fruit / Vegetable Kabob (*Fruits/vegetables on skewers*)
- Parfaits
- Mixed fruit salads
- Melon Mix
- Make fun shapes with cookie cutters
- Make the food look like a figure
- Squash Soup, Vegetable Soup
- Zoodles (spiralized vegetables)
- Serve colorful fruits and vegetables for a colorful plate
- Fruit salsa
- Peanut butter and banana rollups
- Ants on a log (celery, peanut butter and raisins/craisins)
- Serve a 'Fruit of the Month'

WHAT IS A FOOD NEVER SERVED...BUT WANT TO

What is a food or meal you have never served but want to?

- Whole grain chicken nuggets*
- Hummus
- Lentil tacos
- Chickpea curry
- Gyro
- Mediterranean Foods
- Fried Rice
- Peanut butter
- Any type of seafood
- Tacos
- Starfruit
- Durian
- Goat cheese
- Lentil or pea soup
- Dragon fruit
- Plums
- Tofu
- Pizza*
- Chicken Pot Pie*
- Chili*
- Jackfruit and Mangos (*Reason for not serving is it is expensive. If cost is preventing you from serving an item, consider serving a small amount as an extra food item, i.e., provide a 'tasting' of the item.*)
- Baked Chicken

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- Meatloaf*
- Black Bean Burger*
- Mushrooms
- Tomatoes
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa
- Smoothies
- Baked fish
- Using cookie cutters when making sandwiches
- Kielbasa hot dish
- Homemade beef jerky
- Slider sandwiches

RENAME A MEAL

Do you have fun names for the foods you serve? Or list a main dish/side dish served on menus, then give it a fun name. For example, 'Say "Cheese" Sandwich' or 'Monster Mashed Potatoes'

- Ant On a Log (celery, wow butter, and raisins)
- Shipwreck Pie (zucchini, rice, hamburger)
- Carrot Fingers
- Sloppy Joes
- Cyclops (Egg in toast)
- Tidbits versus Chunks
- Mac and Trees*
- Power Pellets (peas)
- Crock-Pot-Cheeseburger (ground beef and cheese on a bun)
- Poo and Piglet Wraps (WG tortillas, peanut butter, and honey)
- Pig in a Blanket
- Beenie Weenie (Hot dogs and Baked Beans)
- Lifesavers (Chicken Rings*)
- Turtle Muffins or Hulk Muffins (banana/spinach muffins ~ they have a green color)
- Cucumber Coins (peel and slice cucumbers)
- Hulk Fries (green beans)
- Chunky Monkey Smoothie
- Banana Boats
- Nuts and Bolts (cereal mix)
- Trees (broccoli)
- Bird Seed (Trail Mix)

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