

Seven Steps to Planning Healthy Meals, Snacks and Drinks



- 1 Plan menus for all the meals, snacks and drinks you provide for children in your setting following the Food and Drink Guidelines from the Department for Education (DfE). This will help children meet their overall nutritional requirements and can also provide a useful checklist for reviewing and amending existing menus.



- 2 Menus should include a variety of different foods, tastes, textures and colours. This will make sure children get the benefits from different nutrients in each food, experience flavours from around the world and build appreciation for food from different cultures at an early age.



- 3 Plan menus lasting at least one week. In practice, a menu that covers between one and four weeks will give children lots of variety. Avoid serving the same food on the same day each week to ensure that children who attend your setting on the same day consistently receive a varied menu.

- 4 Review and reflect on the nutritional value of the menu and consider if it provides a varied amount of nutrients each day and across the week. Also, reflect on drinks, portion sizes and check that foods high in saturated fat, salt and sugar have been avoided.

- 5 Introduce new menus at least twice a year and ideally three to four times a year to include seasonal produce. This will give children the chance to try different foods.

- 6 Share menus for meals and snacks with caregivers. This can help caregivers balance the food they provide at home with the meals and snacks served in your setting. Sharing allergen information, meal times and gathering menu feedback helps prevent overfeeding, eases caregivers' concerns and meets cultural preferences or dietary requirements, ensuring meals meet each child's individual needs.



- 7 When creating menus, consider substitutions and replacement ingredients for children with special dietary requirements and seek advice from caregivers and qualified health professionals to help with menu planning.



These seven steps provide educators with points to consider when planning balanced meals and snacks within early years settings. To find further information on meal planning, please refer to the DfE's [Nutrition Guidance](#).

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