

Top tips for menu planning



- Plan menus for all the meals, snacks, and drinks you provide for a 3-week cycle – this will help to ensure there is variety and balance from each of the main food groups and helps planning for shopping and preparation.
- Plan each meal and snack menu to meet the food and drink guidelines provided. This will help to ensure that children in your care receive the correct amount of nutrients at each meal (important if moving between settings).
- Plan menus to include a variety of colours, tastes and textures to make meals more interesting and appetising. For example, serve crunchy vegetables that require chewing (Appropriate to age group) with soft dishes such as Shepherd's Pie.
- Plan alternating a cold meal with a hot dessert to add variety.
- Plan for preparation and cooking time – look at what you are cooking each day and avoid having a main course and dessert which will take a lot of time to prepare. Divide the food preparation so that it is equally spread throughout the day. You may find that you are limited by what you can fit in the oven and on the hob. Take this into account when planning your menu.
- Home-made dishes will generally be healthier than ready meals because you can select your ingredients carefully and the salt content is likely to be lower.
- Make sure menus cater for all cultural, religious, and dietary needs and only give specific individual meals if necessary. Try adapting usual recipes for some diets, if necessary.
- Introduce new menu cycles at least twice a year, this will help to introduce new recipes and ensure seasonality.
- Talk to parents when planning menus, this helps to ensure the right balance of foods and avoids duplication of meals.
- Minimising waste/use of leftovers – planning menus and ingredients lists can minimise food waste and maximise use of all food e.g. left overs in recipes. Remember to follow the rules about storing and keeping food. www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/labelling-guidance.pdf