

## Home-Based Childcare Meal Planning Guide: Building Balanced and Nutritional Meals for Children

### Why Meal Planning Matters

Meal times are a powerful opportunity to support children's physical development, build healthy habits, and create a sense of routine. As a home-based childcare provider, you are in a unique position to model balanced eating and introduce kids to a wide variety of foods in a safe, nurturing environment.

---

### Key Nutritional Goals

Follow these basic principles when planning meals:

- **Balance:** Include a variety of food groups in every meal.
  - **Variety:** Offer different colors, textures, and flavors to keep meals interesting.
  - **Portion size:** Keep portions appropriate for young children—small servings with the option for seconds.
  - **Hydration:** Offer water throughout the day and serve milk with meals if appropriate.
- 

### Daily Meal Structure (for children ages 1–5)

Here's a recommended structure based on USDA's CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program) guidelines:

#### ► Breakfast

- Whole grain (ex: oatmeal, whole-wheat toast)
- Fruit or vegetable
- Milk (or appropriate dairy alternative)

#### ► AM Snack

- Two of the following: fruit/veg, dairy, protein, or whole grain

#### ► Lunch

- Protein (ex: beans, chicken, tofu, eggs)

- Whole grain (ex: brown rice, whole grain pasta)
- Vegetable
- Fruit
- Milk

► **PM Snack**

- Two of the following: fruit/veg, dairy, protein, or whole grain

♥ **Sample Weekly Meal Plan (Ages 2–5)**

Day	Breakfast	AM Snack	Lunch	PM Snack
Mon	Whole wheat pancakes, banana, milk	Apple slices & cheese	Grilled chicken, brown rice, broccoli, milk	Yogurt & granola
Tue	Scrambled eggs, toast, orange slices, milk	Whole grain crackers & hummus	Turkey sandwich, carrots, grapes, milk	Banana & nut butter
Wed	Oatmeal w/ blueberries, milk	Cucumber slices & pita chips	Bean chili, cornbread, green beans, milk	Trail mix (nut-free)
Thu	Greek yogurt w/ strawberries, granola	Pear slices & cheese sticks	Baked fish, sweet potato, peas, milk	Crackers & applesauce
Fri	Whole grain cereal, peach slices, milk	Celery sticks & sunflower seed butter	Macaroni with turkey, mixed veggies, milk	Muffins & milk

🥕 **Tips for Success**

- **Involve children:** Let them help prepare meals (washing veggies, stirring batter).
- **Use seasonal produce:** It's usually cheaper, fresher, and tastier.
- **Repeat and rotate:** Young kids often need to try a food multiple times before liking it. Rotate favorites and introduce new foods slowly.

- **Allergies and sensitivities:** Always ask families about allergies or restrictions and post a food allergy chart where it's visible during prep.
- 

### **Extended Learning and Resources**

- **ChooseMyPlate** – [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)
  - **CACFP Meal Pattern Guide** – <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks>
  - **Healthy Eating for Kids (Harvard)** – <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-for-kids/>
  - **Feeding Littles** – [www.feedinglittles.com](http://www.feedinglittles.com) (great for tips on picky eating and age-appropriate meals)
- 

### **Final Thoughts**

A well-planned menu reduces stress for you and supports the health and growth of the children in your care. Keep it simple, flexible, and fun. Kids thrive on routines—and mealtime can be one of the most joyful parts of the day!