

Offering Healthy Summer Meals That Kids Enjoy

Ways your summer meal program can help kids fuel up, have fun, and get the nutrition they need for growth and good health

Helping children get the nutrition they need for health and growth is what summer meals are all about. There are many ways you can plan your menus and set up your summer meal sites to make the biggest difference possible. Some small changes in your program can make a positive difference in:

- ☀️ The number of children that attend your summer meal program
- ☀️ How satisfied children feel after eating the provided meal and/or snack
- ☀️ Ensuring that children get the nutrition they need to stay active, healthy, and ready to learn



If your meal site offers foods in addition to what's required in the meal pattern, consider offering healthier extras.

Serving kids an additional ½ cup of baby carrots instead of potato chips provides them with additional vitamin A, a nutrient that helps keep their eyes and skin healthy.



How can I get started? Make a plan and start with changes that work best for your summer meal site. Some easy ideas to start with include:

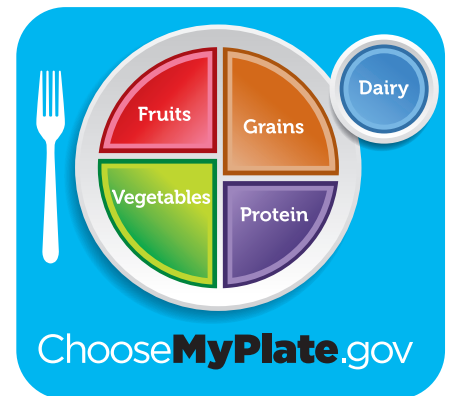
Focus on whole fruits. Serve whole and cut-up fruits more often than juice. Offer favorite fruits, such as melon, apples, and plums, instead of sweets like cake, brownies, or cookies.

Vary your veggies. Offer dark-green, red, and orange vegetables, as well as beans and peas during the week.

Make half your grains whole grains. Look for whole grains listed first on the ingredients list. Try whole-wheat bread, whole-grain tortillas and pastas, and brown rice.

Vary your protein routine. Mix up your main dishes to include seafood, beans and peas, nut or seed butters, eggs, and lean meats and poultry. Limit processed meats, such as hot dogs and bologna, to no more than once per week.

Move to low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk. Offer water as an additional beverage.



How can I offer healthier meals?

- ☀️ Emphasize nutrition expectations in vendor specifications. For example, specify low-fat content for dairy products like cheese, yogurt, and milk.
- ☀️ Share your nutrition goals with program staff, partners, and supporters. Discuss how you are working to make every bite count by offering foods that provide the nutrients kids need to grow and be healthy. Work together to find ways to offer more healthful food items that kids enjoy. Focus on a few small changes at a time.
- ☀️ When building your summer menu, be sure to taste test recipes and possible menu items with children who are participating in afterschool or school meal programs.



Offering ¾ cup of apple slices instead of ¾ cup of apple juice gives kids an additional 2 grams of fiber. Fiber helps kids feel full longer and is good for digestion.



Be Label Smart

Use the Nutrition Facts label and ingredients list to compare food items and choose those that are lower in sodium (salt), saturated fat, and added sugars.

Offering 2 ounces of grilled skinless chicken breast instead of 2 ounces of beef bologna can save 7 grams of saturated fat and 534 milligrams of sodium (salt). These types of simple switches help kids have eating patterns that support healthy hearts.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 2 oz Servings Per Container: 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 218	Calories from Fat 180
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 20g	31%
Saturated Fat 8g	40%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 39mg	13%
Sodium 756mg	32%
Total Carbohydrate 3g	1%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 7g	

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Sample label for beef bologna

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 2 oz Servings Per Container: 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 92	Calories from Fat 18
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 2g	1%
Saturated Fat 1g	1%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 47mg	16%
Sodium 222mg	10%
Total Carbohydrate 0g	0%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 17g	

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Sample label for grilled skinless chicken breast

GET LESS Saturated Fat
GET LESS Sodium



Get less added sugar

You can find added sugars by looking at the ingredients list. Some names for added sugars are: **high-fructose corn syrup, glucose, sucrose, dextrose, fructose, lactose, molasses, maltose, honey, brown sugar, invert sugar, malt syrup, trehalose, turbinado sugar, and corn syrup.**

How can I boost meal appeal?

Small changes can make a big difference in how people think about the meals you offer.

- ☀️ Use healthy, high-quality USDA Foods as staples in your summer menu. Contact your State agency for more information.
- ☀️ Use fresh fruits and vegetables that are at the peak of ripeness and in good condition.
- ☀️ Include hot food items, if you can. Hamburgers and oven roasted chicken are examples of popular hot foods offered at some sites.
- ☀️ Consider offering additional servings of fruits and vegetables, beyond what the meal patterns require. Offer a salad bar, when possible.
- ☀️ Appeal to more adventurous tastes by letting children add sodium-free herbs and spices to their foods at a “flavor station.”

Let kids taste test new foods and provide feedback using this fun ballot.

I Tried a New Food at Summer Meals!

The food I tried was:



Loved It!



Liked It



Tried It
(but not for me)

A fruit or veggie I would like to try at summer meals is:

LITTLE EXTRAS = 😊



Serving different types of whole-grain breads, tortillas, rolls, and pitas during the week makes everyday sandwiches **more appealing.**



Including foods that are different colors, shapes, and textures (crunchy, smooth, crisp, etc.) makes meals **more appetizing.**



Providing extra veggie fillings makes wraps, burgers, rice bowls, and baked potatoes **more satisfying.**

Using a fun placemat makes the view **more interesting.** See [The Summer Food, Summer Moves](#) site for more information.



How can I use local foods in summer meals?

Summer is the perfect time to use local foods for meals, snacks, taste tests, or special events.

- ☀️ During menu planning, think about what's in season and available in your region.
- ☀️ When deciding where to host a new summer meal site, consider locations that are near community or school gardens or farmers markets, so you can integrate local foods into menus, garden activities, and taste tests.
- ☀️ Invite local farmers to visit your summer meal site and talk about the fruits and vegetables being offered and how they are grown.
- ☀️ Get more ideas at the [USDA Farm to Summer Web site](#)



BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

It's true! Kids take their lead from you. When they see you (and other adults) eating healthier foods, they are more likely to do so as well. Making healthy food choices and being physically active are good habits for everyone, not just kids. Good nutrition is an important way to lower your risk for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension.



Getting Volunteers and Staff Excited About Healthy Foods

Get support and buy-in from adults working or volunteering with your summer meal site by sharing some of the benefits of making healthy food choices. Staff and volunteers may enjoy setting goals together or having a friendly challenge. As a group or individually, you could set a goal to eat more vegetables or be more physically active and track your progress.











How can I make healthy meals fun?

- ☀️ Use bright and colorful signs to highlight signature dishes, special offerings, and locally sourced foods.
- ☀️ Consider offering meals for parents or caregivers to purchase, so that they feel welcome and the site feels like a family-gathering spot.
- ☀️ Offer a themed meal, such as a Country Barbeque, Taco Tuesday, or Friday Fajitas, to create excitement.
- ☀️ Have a contest for kids to create imaginative names for healthy meals and snacks.
- ☀️ Use the free activities, posters, placemats, family brochures, flyers, and recipes in Team Nutrition's ***Summer Food, Summer Moves*** kit to make your summer meal site healthier and more fun for kids and families.



Samples from Team Nutrition's *Summer Food, Summer Moves* kit

Sample Lunch or Supper Menus

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
HOT MENU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bean burrito with Summer Vegetable Salsa • Garden salad with vinaigrette • Strawberries** • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked Chicken Drumstick • Mediterranean Quinoa Salad • Cherry tomatoes • Peaches • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tilapia fish taco on whole-grain tortilla** with shredded cabbage and salsa • Carrot sticks with Cool Cucumber Yogurt Dip • Orange (sliced) • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbecued Beef or Pork** on whole-grain roll • Corn on the cob • Collard greens • Watermelon • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stir-fry summer vegetables with chicken** and brown rice** • Pineapple chunks (canned in 100% juice) • Milk* 
COLD MENU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Run Hummus Wrap on whole-grain tortilla** (includes bell pepper, shredded carrots, and spinach) • Cucumber slices • String cheese** • Cantaloupe • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roasted turkey** and cheese** sandwich on whole-grain sub roll with lettuce and tomato • Carrot sticks with Cool Cucumber Yogurt Dip • Apple slices • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garden Fiesta Tuna Pockets on a whole-grain pita with kids' choice of veggie toppings • String cheese** • Unsweetened applesauce** • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilled quesadilla (includes sweet potato, black beans, and reduced-fat cheddar cheese** on whole-grain tortilla**) • Summer Vegetable Salsa • Plum • Milk* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berry Jam Party Bites (includes peanut butter** on whole-grain English muffin half and fresh berries; 2 servings) • String cheese** • Celery • Dried cherries** • Milk* 
<p>*Fat-free or low-fat (1%) unflavored or fat-free flavored. Water is also available with meals. **USDA Foods.</p>					

What are some small changes you can make?

Summer meal sites are all different. What will work for your site?

What is one way your summer meal program will make a change to include healthier food choices?

What is one way your summer meal program will make a change to increase the appeal of the meals and/or activities offered?
