



## Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care

### MENUS AND VARIETY







#### Here's Why...

Remember the saying “variety is the spice of life”? Kids need variety just like adults, especially for establishing lifelong healthy eating habits. Children spend many hours at your facility, so it is important to offer them a wide variety of foods every day. To increase acceptance of new foods, serve them with familiar favorites.

Serving foods from other cultures is also a great way to increase the variety of foods served in your facility. It teaches children about diversity by introducing them to new foods and new cultures.



#### Choices You Make for Your Facility

-  Try different shapes, colors, textures, and temperatures of food.
-  Fruits and vegetables come in many different shapes and colors. Adding new fruits and vegetables to your menu is a quick way to get more variety.
-  If you purchase your food from another kitchen or caterer, talk to them about ways to increase the variety in the menus. Most caterers are happy to work with you to improve the variety of food.
-  Talk to your caterer about the length of your cycle menu. Increasing the length of your cycle menu means greater variety.
-  You can also talk to your caterer about a winter, spring, summer and fall cycle menu to take advantage of fruits and vegetables in season.
-  Don't give up! Children often have to be exposed to a new food at least ten times before they will taste it. Keep trying and one day you'll be surprised!

#### Checklist

- We use a cycle menu of three weeks or greater that changes with the seasons.
- We serve new foods with familiar foods.
- Our menus reflect healthy food options from a variety of cultures.
- We offer a variety of different foods on the weekly menu.



## Getting Support From the Parents

- 🍓 Talk to the parents about healthy foods their children eat at home that might not be served at your facility.
- 🍓 Ask parents to suggest cultural foods that your facility could introduce in the menus, and ask the parents to share their healthy food recipes.
- 🍓 Have parents participate in theme days by bringing in small items like decorations or items that relate to their culture (chopsticks, maps, pictures, etc.).

## Getting the Kids on Board

- 🍓 Kids love food that is colorful and fun. Add foods that are bright in color or have interesting textures to the menu.
- 🍓 Let kids help prepare a new or unfamiliar food in the classroom and then taste their hard work.
- 🍓 Ask kids to share a favorite healthy food from their own culture.
- 🍓 Have theme days such as Italian, Mexican, Spanish and Chinese; discuss culture, food and have taste tests.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.opi.mt.gov/schoolfood/cyclecare.html>

[http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/menu\\_magic.pdf](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/menu_magic.pdf)

[http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/childcare\\_recipes.html](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/childcare_recipes.html)

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