



# Planning Healthy Meals



## **Session Overview**

In this session, participants will learn the benefits of meal planning including how it can help them save time and money. An educator will discuss the basics of planning meals using the MyPlate guidelines. Participants will practice planning healthy meals and determining how much food to purchase. The group will discuss ways to address common challenges to meal planning and possible solutions.

**Target Audience:** English and Spanish speaking adults

**Group Size:** 5-30 participants

**Time Needed:** 30-45 minutes

## **Behavioral Objectives:**

After the session participants will be able to:

1. Plan two days of healthy, budget friendly meals and snacks.
2. Describe at least three ways to include more fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks.
3. State one way to overcome a challenge to planning healthy meals.

## **Key Message:**

Meal planning saves time and money while providing good nutrition to families.

## **Materials Needed for Session:**

- Primary handouts: USDA *Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food (Thrifty Meal Plan)* [www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCostHome.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCostHome.htm), USDA MyPlate *Create a Grocery Plan Weekly Calendar* worksheet, USDA *What's on Your Plate?* handout and *NEOP Everyday Healthy Meals* cookbook, *NEOP-approved Eat Better-Use the Web* ½ page handout; *NEOP The Shape of Yoga* or *Power Up in 10*
- Food models, 8-ounce measuring cup
- Optional: USDA *Sample 2-Week Menus*; WIC *Sample Meal Plan* poster<sup>1</sup>; extra *NEOP Everyday Healthy Meals* cookbooks

## **Outline of 45-minute session:** *(30 minute session in italics)*

- Welcome & introduction (1 min)
- Activity 1: Your Food Budget (4 min) *(3 min)*
- Activity 2: What's for Dinner? (3 min) *(2 min)*
- Activity 3: Let's Plan! (20 min) *(12 min)*
- Activity 4: Review, Improve and Prepare to Shop (8 min) *(5 min)*
- Activity 5: Addressing Challenges to Meal Planning (7 min) *(5 min)*
- Conclusion and Evaluation (2 min)

## **Welcome to "Planning Healthy Meals"** (1 min)

1. Welcome and introduce the class topic *(If teaching this class as a series, review the past class and home activities.)*

Today we will start a two-part class to help you eat right when money is tight. In part one, we will discuss how to plan meals and in part two, we will discuss shopping tips. *(Distribute the handout packet.)*

2. Review the class objectives and the key message.

### **Activity 1: Your Food Budget** (4 min)

1. Last week you were asked to save all of your receipts for food purchases for one week and determine how much you spent on food. Were you surprised at what you found? Who would like to share their cost of food for the week?
2. Look at the ***Cost of Food*** handout. There are four levels – Thrifty Meal Plan, Low-cost Plan, Moderate-cost Plan and Liberal Plan.
3. **Thrifty Meal Plan**  
This meal plan is used to determine the amount of the CalFresh/SNAP benefit. These costs are based on simple meals and do not include eating out. Look at the “Thrifty Plan” column and find the following:
  - Weekly cost of food for one female adult 19-50 years (*Answer = \$38.60\**)
  - Weekly cost of food for one child 4-5 years (*Answer \$25.30\**)
  - **Monthly** cost of food for your family (*Answer will vary based on family size\*; see bottom of table, Family of 4 (couple with 2 children 6-11 yrs of age) = \$632.30*)  
*\* Update information using most current meal plan available*
4. How does your weekly cost of food compare to the Thrifty Plan? CalFresh and other food assistance benefits are meant to supplement your cost of food. You know how much you receive in benefits each month and you know how much you spend on food in one week, so now you have an idea of how much to budget for food. Keeping your food budget in mind, let’s talk about meal planning.

### **Activity 2: What’s for Dinner?** (3 min)

1. How many of you know what you’re having for dinner tonight? Tomorrow night? If you can plan at least a few days of meals and snacks for your family you are on your way to:
  - Eating healthier
  - Saving time and money
  - Reducing trips to the grocery store
2. What do you think about when you decide what to eat? (*Offer examples as needed*)
  - Does your family like certain foods?
  - Do you have leftovers? What’s already in your cupboard?
  - How much time do you have to prepare and cook the food?
  - Are there new recipes or foods you want to try?
  - What foods are on sale or in season?

**Activity:** Share with the person next to you one recipe your family asks you to prepare often.

### **Activity 3: Let’s Plan Meals and Snacks** (20 min)

Meal planning goes beyond just deciding if you are going to have meat, chicken or fish for dinner. To get all the benefits you need to plan the whole plate for your meals and snacks. Today we are going to plan meals and snacks for two days using this ***Weekly Calendar*** worksheet. We will also use the ***What’s on Your Plate*** handout as a guide and the ***Everyday*** cookbook for ideas.

### **Five Tips for Meal Planning:**

As we are planning the meals, keep the following tips in mind to help meet the MyPlate guidelines:

1. **Include all 5 food groups:**
  - Make sure there are 3 – 5 food groups in each meal.
2. **Make half your plate fruits & vegetables:**
  - Make sure there are a fruit and/or vegetable in each meal.
  - Include 2 vegetables at the main meal.
  - Include 1 citrus fruit each day (*orange, grapefruit, tangerine, etc.*).

3. Make half your grains whole:
  - Write in at least three whole grain choices each day (*whole grain cereal, bread, pasta, rice and snack crackers*).
4. Got your dairy?:
  - Include 2-3 low-fat or fat-free dairy foods each day. Milk on your cereal counts.
  - A cup of yogurt or 1 ½ ounces of cheese (a piece the size of your thumb) each count as a serving.
5. Vary your protein food choices:
  - Include some lean meat, poultry or fish. Remove the skin from chicken to get fewer calories and less fat.
  - Write in fish for one of the meals – canned tuna or salmon counts.

Now let's plan meals and snacks for two days, Monday and Tuesday, using the **Weekly Calendar worksheet**. For Monday, we will write in recipes from the **Everyday** cookbook. For Tuesday, we will use our own ideas. (*Optional handout: Use the USDA Sample 2-Week Menus or the more simplified WIC Sample Meal Plan poster for ideas.*)

	Monday*	Tuesday
<b>Breakfast</b>	Find a breakfast recipe that includes a dairy food & a fruit. <i>(Breakfast Fruit Cup, Tropical Eye Opener)</i>	Include 3 – 5 food groups.
<b>Lunch</b>	Find a lunch recipe that includes a veg. & a protein food. <i>(Black Bean &amp; Corn Pitas, Zesty Asian Chicken Salad, Tuna Apple Salad)</i>	Include 3 – 5 food groups.
<b>Dinner</b>	Find a dinner recipe that includes a protein food, a veg. & a grain food. <i>(Chicken &amp; Dumplings, Vegetable Chicken Enchiladas, Simple Fish Tacos)</i>  What vegetable side dish can we include?  <i>(Zucchini Sauté, Avocado Tortilla Soup, Herbed Vegetable Combo, Savory Greens)</i>	Include 3 – 5 food groups.
<b>Snacks</b>	Find a snack recipe that includes a vegetable & a snack recipe that includes a grain food.  <i>(Chickpea Dip with Vegetables, Veggie Tortilla Roll-up)</i>	Use snacks to fill in any gaps.

**\*All of the recipes include at least 3 of the 5 food groups.**

#### **Activity 4: Review, Improve and Prepare to Shop** (8 min)

1. Look at your meal plan and ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do you have the recommended amount for each food group each day? (Refer to the back side of the **What's on Your Plate?** handout.)
  - Is half the plate fruits and vegetables?
  - Do the meals have a good variety of colors and flavors?
  - Are the recipes easy to prepare?
  - Will the children like the meals?
  - Do you need to make any changes?

**Activity:** Tell the person next to you one thing you may want to change or improve.

2. How much food will you need to buy? You can save time and money by determining how much you need before you go to the store. Let's look at two examples:
  - a. 100% juice – How much juice should you buy if you wanted to serve a ½ cup of orange juice to a family of four? ½ cup each for 4 people is 2 cups (1 pint or 16 oz). *(Or use fruit, such as bananas or apples, as an example.)*
  - b. Meat can be an expensive part of our food budget so it is important to buy and serve the right amount – for health and our wallet!
    - As a guideline, 4 ounces of raw meat becomes 3-ounces of cooked meat due to the loss of water and fat when cooking.
    - Or, just remember that one pound of ground meat serves about 4 people. Remember, bones, fat, water and shells will add weight.

### **Activity 5: Addressing Challenges to Meal Planning** (7 min)

Now we are going to look at some common challenges to getting that healthy meal on the table. We will divide into groups. I will present each group with a meal planning problem. Each group will talk about the problem and come up with ways to solve it. Be creative! In a few minutes, each group will be asked to share their problem and solutions. *(Or, conduct as a large group if time is limited.)*

Let's start with group one. Please read your problem and share your group's solutions. *(Offer the following possible solutions as needed.)*

**Problem #1** – I don't have time to cook

#### Possible Solutions:

- Try 'no-cook' meals like sandwiches, salads with canned beans or tuna added
- Use convenience foods – take the help where you can afford it. Try canned and frozen vegetables, bagged salads, grated cheese, pasta sauce. Use complete frozen dinners and boxed casserole kits less often.
- Batch Cook – double recipes or use part of the recipe and freeze the rest for later.
- Remember, you will save time when you plan!
- Choose "quick and easy" recipes. Preparation and cook times are shown for recipes in your cookbook.

**Problem #2** – Sometimes I make several items at one meal because my kids don't like or want the same things.

#### Possible Solutions:

- Let kids help with the planning. Perhaps they can take turns choosing items or recipes for the meal. If kids help plan and prepare meals they are more likely to eat them.
- Let kids help with meal preparation and serving. Choose jobs that are appropriate for their age.
- "Create your own" meals – salad, burrito, pizza, veggie plate – encourage kids to try new foods

**Conclusion and Evaluation:** (2 min)

You don't have to be perfect. Plan your meals and then change them if you want to take advantage of sale items or the opportunity to try new foods.

Last week we discussed the benefits of physical activity and tips to be active. This booklet provides more ways to be active. (*Distribute **The Shape of Yoga or Power Up in 10** booklets and highlight a couple of the activities.*) You can use water bottles or canned food as weights and a towel as a mat.

**Home activities:**

1. Continue using your worksheet and plan meals for one week.
2. Post your weekly meal plan on the refrigerator to remind you and family members to eat healthy meals and snacks.
3. Try two of the activities in ***The Shape of Yoga or Power Up in 10*** booklet.
4. Go to the MyPlate, Champions for Change or Eat Fresh website and find two tips on how to be more physically active. (*Refer to the **Eat Better-Use the Web** handout.*)

**Evaluation:**

- Do you have any questions?
- Let's review. (*Distribute evaluation forms or conduct verbally.*)

## Planning Healthy Meals

**After attending this class I feel confident that I can:**

	Agree Very Much	Agree	I Am Not Sure	Disagree	Disagree Very Much
1) Plan two days of healthy, budget friendly meals and snacks.					
2) Describe at least three ways to include more fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks.					
3) State one way to overcome a challenge to planning healthy meals.					

**Closing:**

Thanks for attending the class and I hope you are now able to plan healthy meals.

*If part of a series of classes:*

At our next class, we will talk about shopping on a budget. Please bring your grocery store circular ads to our next meeting.

**References:**

<sup>1</sup>Sample Meal Plan <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Pages/WICNEHEAEducationCampaigns.aspx>

For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. Funded by the USDA SNAP-Ed, an equal opportunity provider and employer. Visit [www.CaChampionsForChange.net](http://www.CaChampionsForChange.net) for healthy tips.