



# No More Mealtime Madness: Plan Your Way To A Peaceful Meal With Kids

*60-minute lesson*

## GOAL

Help caregivers plan and prepare quick, budget-friendly, chaos-free meals at home.

## OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Introduce fundamentals of maintaining a basic pantry.
- ✓ Introduce fundamentals of planning weekly menus.
- ✓ Discuss ways to involve kids in the meal planning to create more buy-in at mealtime.

## KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ Plan weekly menus in advance to save time and money, reduce mealtime stress, and make healthier choices. Include ideas from the whole family for better buy-in and fewer fights.
- ✓ Maintain a basic pantry to help you save time and eat healthier in a pinch. A stocked pantry helps you put together quick meals using foods you have on hand.

## MATERIALS

Flip chart or white board • Markers/pens • Name tags • Ingredients and equipment for your chosen recipes • Materials for kids' activity (if using - optional)

## KIDS' ACTIVITY OPTIONS

**We have provided a booklet of activities that can be used with kids.** The following are suggestions for specific activities that may be complementary to what caregivers are learning in this lesson. **You are not limited to this list** – feel free to use whatever activities are most appropriate for your situation.

Note that some activities are written for the whole family, but can be easily modified for an activity with only kids.

- For younger kids:
  - Name That Food, page 12
  - Imaginary Cooking, page 14
  - Any of the coloring sheets on pages 21-32
- For older kids:
  - Make Your Plate a Rainbow, page 50
  - Food Riddles, page 51
  - Activity Ball Toss, page 60

## CAREGIVER HANDOUTS

We have provided a comprehensive set of handouts for each lesson that can be 1) used as references for the instructor to prepare for class 2) referenced verbally and/or visually during class to guide discussion 3) provided as take-homes for caregivers to reinforce what they learned in class and encourage further learning. **You are NOT required to provide all of these handouts as take-homes** (though you may if you wish). Feel free to pick and choose which you feel are most helpful and appropriate. However, we ask that **at a minimum you provide a printed copy of the recipe(s) you prepared in class, as well as the Making It Work at Home handout.**

Check off the handouts you plan to reference during class

- Menu Planning Basics
- The Cooking Matters Pantry
- Stocking Your Pantry
- Stretching Your Ingredients
- Sub It In
- Making Recipes Work for You
- Shopping with Kids
- Spice It Up
- Chill Out
- Delicious Dips and Spreads
- Making It Work at Home**

## RECIPE OPTIONS

Choose **at least 1 snack to prepare in advance and share during discussion and at least 1 meal or side dish** (or as many as time allows) **for the hands-on cooking.** The following chart provides some ideas. You may use other recipes if you wish – see [CookingMatters.org/recipes](http://CookingMatters.org/recipes) for more ideas. If you are not using a Cooking Matters recipe, please be sure it contains only ingredients that are affordable and accessible for low-income caregivers, does not require fancy cooking tools, and follows healthy eating guidelines. If of interest and appropriate for your group, make your own homemade baby food in place of the snack.

Snacks			
Recipe Ideas	Prep and Cook Time	Time Saving Tips	Talking Points
<a href="#">Tuna boats</a>	Prep Time: 15 minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	Prepare in advance of the lesson to offer as taste test.	“Not a fan of tuna? Try other pantry staples like canned salmon or chicken, packed in water.”
<a href="#">Hummus</a>	Prep Time: 8 minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	Prepare in advance of the lesson to offer as taste test.	“Particularly with picky kids, dips are a great way to add new flavors that will encourage kids to eat their fruits and vegetables.”  “Making hummus from scratch is easy and far less expensive than buying it already prepared in the store.”

Recipe Ideas	Prep and Cook Time	Time Saving Tips	Talking Points
<a href="#">Delicious Dips and Spreads handout, offered with raw vegetables or fruits</a>	Prep Time: 8 minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	Prepare in advance of the lesson to offer as taste test.	<p>"Many yummy dips can be made quickly from pantry items like canned beans or items that last longer in your fridge like yogurt and cream cheese."</p> <p>"Kids love to dip their foods. Particularly with picky kids, dips are a great way to add new flavors that will encourage kids to eat their fruits and vegetables."</p> <p>"Dips can be made on the weekends, or when you have a little extra time, and used throughout the week. Get kids involved in the mixing and mashing!"</p>
<a href="#">Apple Wraps</a>	Prep Time: 8 minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	Prepare in advance of the lesson to offer as taste test.	<p>"Store tortillas in the fridge to last longer – or you can even keep them in the freezer so you always have them available to make a quick snack, lunch, or dinner."</p> <p>"Sub in any nut butter you like – like sun butter if you're in a peanut-free environment. Or, try another spread like hummus."</p> <p>"These wraps can also serve as a quick, no-cook meal. Throw in a little leftover chicken or a sprinkle of nuts or seeds if you like."</p>

### Meal or Side Dish

Recipe Ideas	Prep and Cook Time	Time Saving Tips	Talking Points
<a href="#">Noodles with Peanut Sauce</a>	Prep Time: 10 minutes Cook Time: 10 minutes	No prep needed in advance.	<p>"This is great example of a quick meal made from pantry staples. All of the ingredients can be stored and ready to use when you need a quick recipe."</p> <p>"Have leftover veggies and/or protein from yesterday's meals? Top this recipe with them as a way to add flavor and stretch your food across meals."</p>

Recipe Ideas	Prep and Cook Time	Time Saving Tips	Talking Points
<a href="#">Veggie Wraps</a>	Prep Time: 15minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	No prep needed in advance.	<p>“Talk about quick and easy! Veggie wraps don’t require any cooking and can be made in advance for grab-n-go lunches or dinner.”</p> <p>“You can also slice these into ‘pinwheels’ for a healthy snack that’s fun for kids.”</p> <p>“Store tortillas in the fridge to last longer – or you can even keep them in the freezer so you always have them available to make a quick snack, lunch, or dinner. Yogurt is a great item to keep on hand in your fridge because it can last for a couple of weeks.”</p>
<a href="#">Stove Top Macaroni and Cheese</a>	Prep Time: 20 minutes Cook Time: 20minutes	Cook noodles in advance. Grate cheese in advance. Use lesson time to focus on making sauce and using pantry staples to add veggies or protein to a family favorite.	<p>“Pantry staples like canned tuna, salmon or chicken, packed in water, are a good way to make this dish heartier or extended to serve more people.”</p> <p>“Don’t have macaroni pasta on hand? Simply swap the macaroni for penne, ziti, shells, rotini or another pantry pasta that you have on hand or that’s on sale.”</p> <p>“Keep cream cheese on hand in the fridge – it lasts a couple weeks and can make for an easy veggie dip too.”</p>
<a href="#">Cranberry Walnut Coleslaw</a>	Prep Time: 15 minutes Cook Time: 0 minutes	No prep needed in advance.	<p>“Coleslaw is good to make ahead when you have more time and then incorporate into multiple meals throughout the week as a side dish, piled in a sandwich or wrap for added crunch, or add some chicken for a filling meal.”</p> <p>“Nuts, dried fruits, and vinegars are good to keep on hand in your pantry for added flavor and texture to otherwise ordinary dishes like this coleslaw or even chicken salad or tuna salad.”</p> <p>“Vegetables like carrots and cabbage last longer than most vegetables in the fridge and therefore make for nice pantry stocking for healthy meals.”</p>

## CLASS TIME

### PAPERWORK (5 MINUTES):

As caregivers arrive, have them complete the demographics portion of the participant survey and sign a waiver.

### MAIN COURSE: LESSON TOPIC (50 MINUTES):

#### INTRODUCTION: (5 MINUTES)

1. **Welcome caregivers.** Introduce instructors and any other volunteers or helpers.
2. **Set expectations.** Explain that caregivers will learn how to save time and money, and cut down on mealtime stress, by planning weekly menus and maintaining a basic pantry. We'll also discuss ways to involve kids in the meal planning to create more buy-in at mealtime.
3. **Get acquainted.**

ASK

*"What are you looking forward to learning in this session?"*

- Write their responses on flip-chart paper and make an effort to cover as many of their questions as possible.

#### TASTE TEST, HANDS-ON COOKING, AND DISCUSSION (45 MINUTES)

1. **Begin by having kids and caregivers eat a pre-prepared snack together.**
  - Have kids and caregivers serve themselves the snack.
  - As they serve the snack, point out the pantry items used in the recipes (e.g., canned tuna and beans in Tuna Boats, nut butter in Apple Wraps).

ASK

*"What foods do you normally keep on hand in your pantry? How can a well-stocked pantry save you time and money?"*

- As needed, point out that a stocked pantry is a time-saver because you can create healthy meals and snacks in a hurry – no need to run back out to the store. It's also a money-saver – you can stock up on pantry items when you find them on sale or for a great price. You can also sub in low-cost pantry items for more expensive ingredients in a recipe – or use them in a pinch if you forgot an ingredient.
- Review the Stocking Your Pantry handout and the Cooking Matters Pantry handout and point out great items to always have on hand. Ask caregivers what other items they would add to this list – for example, what items they would stock in their freezer or even longer-lasting items to stock in the fridge (e.g., eggs, cheese, large bag of apples or oranges). Let caregivers ask questions about any items they see on the list that they may not know how to use (e.g., vinegar, cornstarch), and have others in the group respond with their suggestions.

ASK

*"I'd like to hear from the kids. What did you like about today's snack? What might you change to help you like it better (e.g., using a different fruit)?"*

- Point out easy swaps caregivers can make to suit their children's tastes. Remind them that hearty snacks like Tuna Boats and Apple Wraps can be made as a simple, healthy dinner meal too!

## 2. Next, have caregivers prepare a meal or side dish.

- Have caregivers and kids wash hands using proper hand washing techniques.

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***NOTE:** If you have a helper to lead children, this is a good time to pull kids into a separate activity of your choosing while caregivers continue the discussion. If not, identify a specific cooking task for kids or give them a designated area for independent play.*

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- Introduce the recipe you have chosen
- Delegate different recipe steps as needed. While caregivers are working:

ASK

*"Do you plan menus in advance? What are some of the benefits? What are some of the challenges?"*

- As needed, point out that menu planning helps us save money (by avoiding unnecessary purchases, using up items you have on hand, and using ingredients across several meals) and helps us eat better (by reducing reliance on convenience items, planning to include healthy foods from all food groups, and avoiding impulse buys).
- Address 1-2 common menu planning challenges and let caregivers offer each other ideas to overcome those challenges. Use the following table to offer additional ideas as needed. If time permits, address additional challenges mentioned by caregivers.

MENU PLANNING CHALLENGES	
Challenge	Talking Points
I'm short on time. It feels like one more thing to do.	<p>"Meal planning does take time up front – but it pays off big time throughout the week. Compare the 20-30 minutes you would spend meal planning to the time you save with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick trips to the store – you know exactly what you need to buy;</li> <li>• Less arguing with kids – if it's not on the list, you're not buying it;</li> <li>• No wasted time each day (not to mention the stress!) trying to figure out what you're going to feed the family; and</li> <li>• No extra trips to the store for forgotten ingredients or grabbing something to eat that night." <p>"The key is scheduling that planning time each week when you know you'll have the time and energy to tackle it. Think about what regular time in your schedule might work best."</p> </li></ul>
My family's weeks are so busy and everyone is on a different schedule. It's hard to predict what future mealtimes will require.	<p>"Meal planning takes into account the family schedule and gives you an opportunity to be <i>better</i> prepared for the unpredictability of active family life. You'll avoid wasting food on meals if only half the family will be there to eat it. You also avoid the stress of the last-minute scramble coming up with meal ideas each day."</p>
My kids are picky eaters and my spouse has dietary issues, it's hard to plan one meal we all can agree on.	<p>Get everyone involved in meal planning. Asking for each person's preferences not only creates buy-in, but also gives you opportunity in advance to plan a single core meal (like tacos) that can be adapted at the table to suit individual tastes (like adding or leaving out certain toppings). Plus, satisfied eaters will waste less food, which is money saved.</p>

➤ Wrap up the discussion by reviewing the tips on the Menu Planning Basics handout.

### 3. If kids and caregivers have been separated, bring them back together for eating time.

➤ As kids and caregivers eat:



"What are other ways to involve the whole family in menu planning?"

- Point out that, just like getting kids involved in the cooking, involving kids in the planning can get kids excited about mealtime and increase their willingness to try new things. Suggest having kids help plan at least one meal per week to start. Use the following table to offer additional ideas as needed.

MENU PLANNING WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY	
Idea	Talking Points
Create theme nights	Work with kids to plan a mealtime tradition for a given day of the week so kids can look forward to it (e.g., Taco Tuesday or Pizza Friday). This also helps simplify the planning each week.
Ask for family favorites	Ask everyone in your family to list their favorite dishes. Keep a master list of 10-20 favorite family dishes and refer to this list often when you plan your meals.
Review the family calendar	Who is working late? Are there afterschool activities or appointments? Plans to visit friends or neighbors? Take everyone's schedule into consideration and plan accordingly. Leftovers work great for these nights.
Check the weather	Appoint kids as official family meteorologists to check the week's weather, then predict what you might be in the mood to eat. Rainy and cold on Monday? Perfect for soup night. Temperature and humidity rising on Thursday? No-Cook Veggie Wraps, sliced in pinwheels for kids, with a side of guacamole and chips, sounds refreshing.



*"I'd like to hear from the kids, how do you feel about having a special job to do as part of meal planning and food shopping? Is there a specific task you think would be fun to do?"*



If time permits:

- Ask for other helpful tips on planning and shopping with kids. For example, point out that shopping can go much more smoothly when you give kids a job! Designate them "produce pickers" to pick out their favorite fruit or veggie or the produce items you have on your list. Have your kids select a type of item within a category. For example, if you need pasta or beans, leave it up to your kids to choose the style (macaroni, penne, or spaghetti pasta; black, pinto or kidney beans).

## CLOSING (5 MINUTES):

- **ENCOURAGE:** Encourage caregivers to choose one thing they learned today that they will commit to trying at home this week. Have them share aloud if they are willing.
- **ASK:** Model mealtime conversation starters between families by asking kids to share with their caregivers their favorite part of today's session, the best food they tried, and/or something they want to try helping with at home.
- **TAKE:** Share handouts for caregivers to take home, as well as any incentive items you are providing. **Caregivers must complete the participant survey questions and return the forms to you before receiving their take-home items.**

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