



Lakelands
Public Health

Childcare Summer Menus

Gather and Grow 2026

Erica Diamond, Registered Dietitian

Laura Abbasi, Registered Dietitian

Elaine McCarthy, Community Worker

June 5th, 2026

Today's Learning Outcomes

Participants will:

- Review menu planning best practices
- Use the menu self-assessment tool
- Explore summer menu ideas and food safety strategies
- Gain confidence in planning nutritious summer menus
- Collaboratively develop a childcare summer menu



Why Transition Menus for the Summer/Warm Weather?



- More outdoor time, field trips, picnics
- Fresh local produce becomes more available
- Warmer weather
(e.g., extreme temperatures, hot kitchens, food safety considerations)

Menu Planning Review

Meal Pattern

Each meal includes foods from all three food groupings.

Meals should include at least:

- 2 choices of **Vegetables and Fruits**
- 1 choice of **Whole Grain Foods**
- 1 choice from **Iron-rich Protein Foods**
- **Milk**

Week 1					
Choice	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Snack – Include a vegetable and fruit choice and <i>at least</i> one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B)					
Vegetables and Fruits	Frozen fruit	Canned peaches	Applesauce	Strawberries	Banana slices
Whole Grains		Whole grain cereal	Whole wheat toast	Whole wheat pita triangles	Oat granola
Protein	Yogurt	Milk	Hard boiled eggs	Chocolate hummus	Yogurt
Meal/Lunch – Include choices from all food groupings					
Entrée Name	Tomato Beef Pasta Bake	Stuffed Pepper Casserole	Three Bean Chili and Buns	Tuna Sandwiches and Squash Soup	Chicken Caesar Salad Wraps
Vegetables and Fruits (2 choices)	Frozen carrots & peas	Peppers, onions	Tomatoes, corn	Squash Soup	Broccoli florets
	Bananas	Garden salad	Green beans	Green peppers	Romaine lettuce
Whole Grains	Whole wheat pasta	Brown rice	Whole wheat bun	Whole grain bread	Whole wheat tortilla
Iron-rich Protein	Ground beef	Ground turkey or lentils	Mixed canned beans	Tuna	Chicken or tofu
Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk
Snack – Include a vegetable and fruit choice and <i>at least</i> one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B)					
Vegetables and Fruits	Raw vegetables	Cucumbers	Melon slices	Canned pineapple	Carrots
Whole Grains	Whole grain crackers	Whole grain mini bagels		Mini oat muffin	'Carrot cake' oatmeal squares
Protein	Hummus	Spinach dip (cottage cheese)	Cheese cubes	Cottage cheese	

Menu Planning Review cont.



Snack Pattern

The snack pattern below should be offered daily, in any order.

Snack A

- 1 choice of **Vegetables and Fruits**
- 1 choice from **Protein Foods**

Snack B

- 1 choice of **Vegetables and Fruits**
- 1 choice from **Whole Grain Foods**

Menu Planning Tool

Menu Revision Tool for Child Care Settings

The **Menu Revision Tool** is designed to assist child care cooks and licensees to improve their menus to align with the recommendations in the [Child Care Menu Planning – Practical Guide](#).

Child care licensees are encouraged to follow the 3 steps below to make gradual improvements to their menu.

STEP 1: Prepare for the revision process

Review the [Practical Guide](#):

- Learn about the recommended **meal and snack patterns** (pages 5-6)
- Use the **food choice tables** on pages 9-20 to make sure that:
 - ✓ foods offered are from the **Serve** category
 - no more than three foods per week are from the **Limit** category for whole grains, and
 - ✗ no foods from the **Do Not Serve** category are offered

On the menu, add details about:

- **Vegetables and Fruits** (e.g., steamed carrot sticks, cooked broccoli, canned peaches in juice (drained), fresh pear slices)
- **Whole Grain** foods (e.g., brown rice, whole grain pasta, whole wheat bread)
- **Protein** foods (e.g., black beans, ground beef, chicken thighs, canned salmon) and,
- Beverages offered, including water

STEP 2: Revise the menu


Use the table below to assess the menu's **meals and snacks** and the **food and beverage** choices. Read each recommendation carefully and add a checkmark in the appropriate box. To complete the checklist, involve staff who develop menus and prepare food (e.g., cooks, caterers).

TIP: The following tools can help you revise your meals and snacks:

- The [Fillable Menu Template](#)
- The [Meal and Snack Checklist](#)

Recommendations	Yes	No
MEALS		
All meals include at least: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 choices from Vegetables and Fruits, • 1 choice from Whole Grain foods, • 1 choice from iron-rich Protein foods, • Milk to drink. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SNACKS		
One snack includes at least: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 choice from Vegetables and Fruits, • 1 choice from Whole Grain foods. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The other snack includes at least: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 choice from Vegetables and Fruits, • 1 choice from Protein foods. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
VARIETY		
Once per day , serve dark green vegetables such as broccoli, bok choy, spinach, green peppers, and peas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few times a week , serve orange vegetables such as carrots, orange peppers, sweet potatoes, and squash.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At least twice a day , serve whole grains such as barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, and whole grain pasta, tortillas, pitas, crackers or cereals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At least once per week , serve a plant-based protein meal with beans, lentils, or tofu.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At least once per week , serve a meal with eggs or fish such as cod, sole, haddock, salmon, mackerel, tilapia, trout, light tuna or whitefish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The menu includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 4-6 week cycle, • A variety of colours, shapes, temperatures and textures, • Dishes that reflect various cultures and traditions. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BEVERAGES		
At all times , tap water is available to children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At meals , serve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homogenized (3.25%) milk to children 12-24 months of age, • 1% or 2% milk to children older than 24 months. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does Your Menu Offer?

 Do Not Serve - Does your menu offer? ¹	Yes	No
Flavoured milk or soy beverages such as chocolate milk, vanilla soy beverage, hot chocolate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit or vegetable juices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Battered or deep-fried vegetables such as French fries, hash browns and vegetable chips.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tortilla/pita chips and chip-like snack foods, pretzels, and baked goods with chocolate, caramel or candy pieces.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Processed cheese products such as processed cheese slices and breaded cheese sticks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frozen desserts such as ice cream, freezie-type, ice pops, slushies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foods that contain few or no nutrients and/or contain high amounts of salt, sugar or saturated fats such as cupcakes, pies, jelly desserts, puddings, croissants and marshmallows.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foods that are highly processed and/or contain high amounts of sodium such as deli meats, pepperoni, bacon, wieners, sausages, ham, prepared store-bought breaded or battered fried chicken or fish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foods that are choking hazards for children under 4 without adequate preparation. Some examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole/chopped nuts and seeds, chunky peanut or nut butter, • raw vegetables or hard fruit (unless grated or thinly sliced), • whole grapes and cherry tomatoes (unless cut into quarters, lengthwise). 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹ Refer to the [Practical Guide](#) pages 9-20 for the complete list of **Do Not Serve** foods.

Make a Plan to Improve Your Menu

STEP 3: Make a plan to improve your menu

Review results of **Step 2** with your child care team. Use the table below to develop your menu improvement plan. Note specific actions and timelines that are needed to reach each goal (e.g., what, who, when). Check the last column once each goal is completed.

	Goals	Actions	Who	When	✓
	What do you want to accomplish?	Steps required to achieve your goal	Who is responsible for the action?	Target date of implementation	
Example	Eliminate processed meats from weeks 1 and 3.	1. Change ham to tuna sandwiches (week 1). 2. Use chicken in place of pepperoni on pizza (week 3).	1. Supervisor to make change on the menu. 2. Cook to update recipe binder.	1. April 2024 2. June 2024	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Goals	Actions	Who	When	✓
Goal 1					<input type="checkbox"/>
Goal 2					<input type="checkbox"/>
Goal 3					<input type="checkbox"/>

TIP: Visit [Child Care Resources](#) for additional menu planning resources. Your local [public health unit](#) may also be able to offer support.

Summer Menu Opportunities

Summer allows for:

- More fresh/local produce
- Colourful meals and snacks
- Outdoor snack and/or meal opportunities
- Food literacy building opportunities

Need to also Consider:

- Cooking when there is extreme heat
- More school aged children with day camps
- Varying eating skills of children (infants all the way up to school aged-textures need to be flexible!)



Serving Food Outdoors: What Helps?

Focus on logistics! Set your team up for success.

Helpful strategies:

- pre-portion foods indoors
- use trays/bins for transport
- simplify serving (e.g. options that require no utensils- fruit, sandwiches/tacos, snack boxes)
- keep handwashing routines consistent
 - hand hygiene stations set up outside or wipes when needed to remove visible debris and hand sanitizer



Food Safety Tips For Eating Outdoors

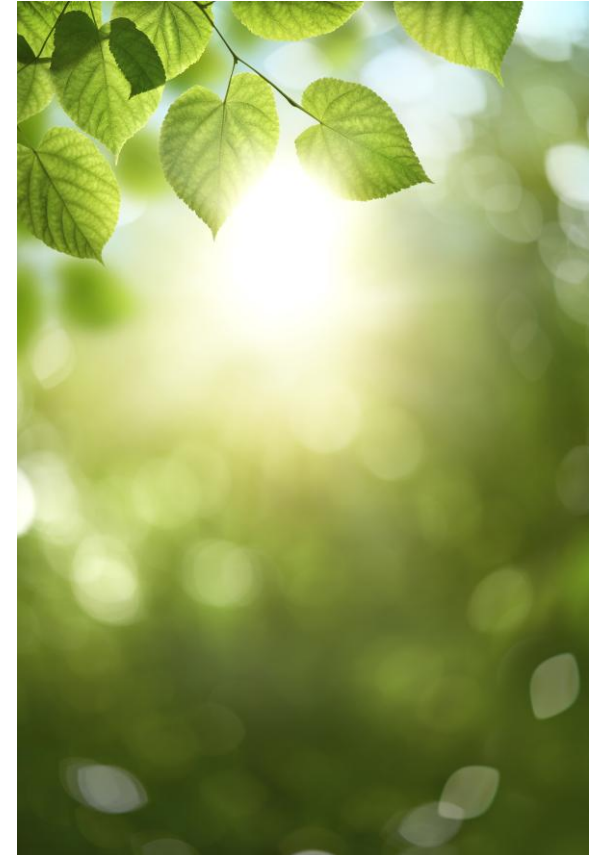
Keep Cold Foods Cold

- use insulated coolers + ice packs
- avoid prolonged sun exposure
- keep dairy/protein foods chilled
- monitor temperatures

Avoid and pay attention to foods that can spoil quickly in heat

Examples of higher-risk foods:

- mayonnaise salads
- yogurt
- milk
- meats and cheese





Let's Get Cooking!

Recipes!

[Three sisters tacos - Canada.ca](#)

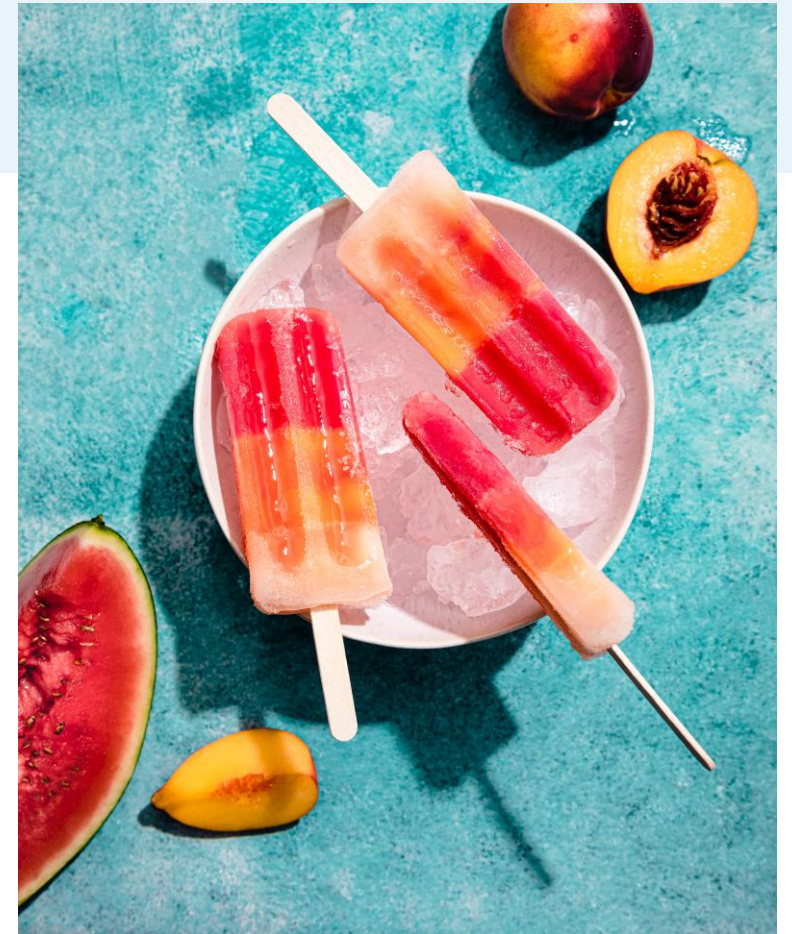
[Zucchini Fritters - Budget Bytes](#)

[Chocolate berry overnight oats - Canada.ca](#)



Summer Menu Planning Tips

- Build around seasonal availability
- Plan ahead-batch prep produce
- Prep early in cooler hours of the day
- Include no-cook recipes to help keep kitchens cooler
- Frozen produce can work well and can help reduce prep
- Slow cookers/appliances
- Use shelf-stable already cooked plant-based proteins



Extreme Heat: Why It Matters for Children

Children are at higher risk during extreme heat events

Children's bodies:

- Heat up more quickly
- Sweat less
- Have less-developed temperature regulation

Children depend on adults to:

- Stay hydrated (water, milk, breastmilk/formula)
- Access cooler environments

Children rely on you to recognize risk early and act quickly.



Adjusting Menus for Extreme Weather Days

Extreme heat can:

- Impact appetite
- Increase dehydration risk
- Make spaces hot and uncomfortable
- Increase food safety risks
- Limit outdoor eating opportunities

Menu planning strategies:

- Prioritize cold meals
- Reduce oven/stove use when possible
- Increase hydrating foods
- Simplify preparation

Examples:

Yogourt Pops

Cold salads and sandwiches



Preventing Heat Illness in Child Care Settings

Practical actions for educators and cooks

Keep children and staff cool

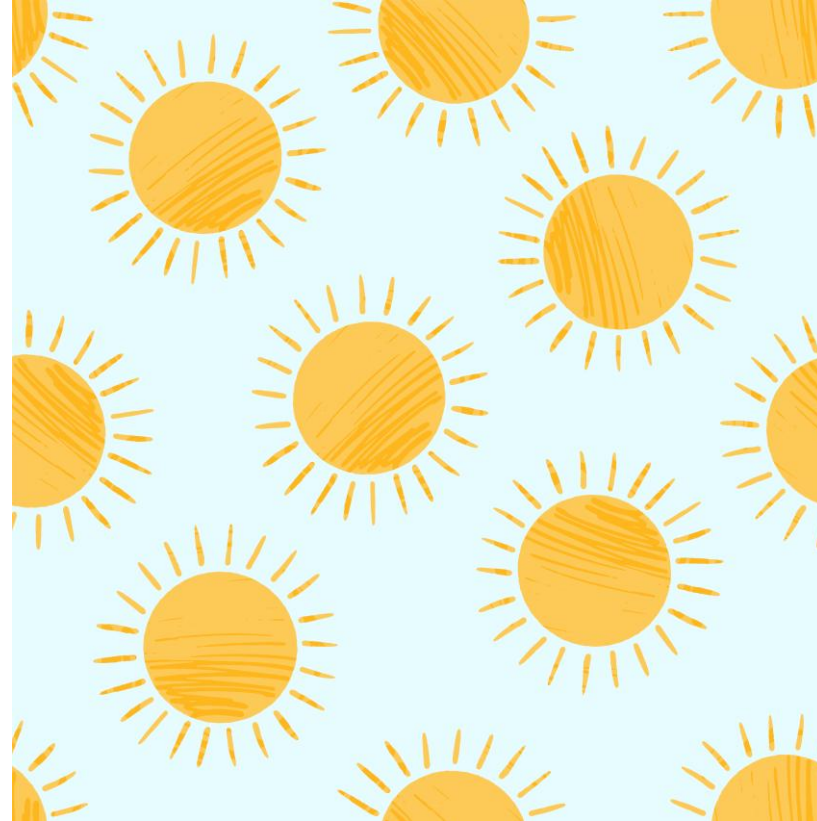
- Use shaded or air-conditioned spaces
- Adjust outdoor play during peak heat
- Maintain staff breaks

Support hydration

- Offer water often (do not wait for thirst)
- Incorporate hydrating foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables)
- Monitor children who may not drink enough independently

Watch for early signs of heat illness

- Thirst, fatigue, irritability
- Dizziness, headache, nausea



Extreme Weather Resources for Childcare

- [Extreme Heat | Lakelands Public Health](#)
 - Sign up for alerts
 - Trusted resources for families/staff
- [Keep children cool! Protect your child from extreme heat - Canada.ca](#)
- [Safety for infants and young children during extreme heat](#)



Hydration in Hot Weather: Water First!

Key reminders:

- water available and visible all day
- offer water more often outdoors (e.g., set up hydration stations)

Include water-rich foods on your menus:

- watermelon
- cucumbers
- oranges
- berries

“How do you encourage children to drink water in your program?”



Why Food Waste Matters

Food Waste Impacts:

- Budget
- Environmental impact
- Staff workload

"Use it Up" Menu Ideas!

- Veggies → Pasta salads, bean dips
- Fruit → Smoothies, Muffins
- Rice → Fried rice, rice salads, rice crust quiche
- Beans → Add to baking (brownies, cookies)
- Yogourt → Frozen pops



Reduce Food Waste

Planning

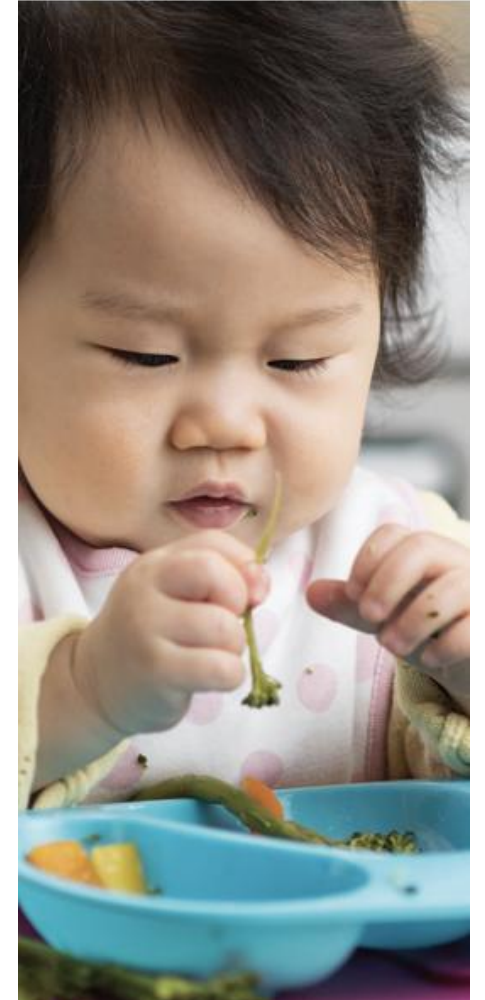
- Cross-utilize ingredients
- Use cycle menus
- Plan for leftovers safely

Storage Tips:

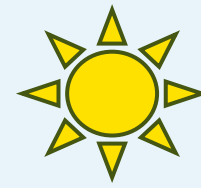
- FIFO (First In, First Out)
- Label food
- Proper produce storage

Reduce Plate Waste:

- Child size portions
- Serve familiar foods with new foods/flavours
- Support children to self-serve when appropriate
- Eat with children/model enjoying foods together
- Involve children in deciding on menu items
- Invite children to help prep or be involved in cooking!



Menu Swaps Review



Higher Risk Outdoors

mayo salad sandwiches

cream-based pasta

large serving bowls

Lower Risk Alternatives

hummus wraps

vinaigrette pasta salad

pre-portioned containers



Summer Menu Revision

Your Challenge!

- Adapt a menu from cold- to warm-weather
- Make at least 5-8 menu changes-be creative!
- Report back what you changed and why you changed it

Requirements:

- Follow ODPH meal/snack patterns
- Include seasonal foods
- Consider portability for the option to eat outdoors
- Consider food safety considerations, extreme heat

Time: 15-20 minutes



Menu Template

Title		Week #				
Food Choice	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Snack – Include a vegetable & fruit choice and <i>at least</i> one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B)						
Vegetables & Fruits						
Whole Grains						
Protein						
Meal/Lunch – Include choices from all food groupings						
Entrée Name						
Vegetables & Fruits (2 choices)						
Whole Grains						
Iron-rich Protein						
Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk	
Snack – Include a vegetable & fruit choice and <i>at least</i> one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B)						
Vegetables & Fruits						
Whole Grains						
Protein						

Tap water is always available to drink.

Disclaimer: The application and use of this template is the responsibility of the user. ODPH assumes no responsibility for this menu.



© Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH), 2024 odph.ca



Summary

- Embrace creativity with summer menus.
- Choose outdoor-friendly meals for flexible programming.
- Prioritize food safety and hydration.
- Small changes have a big impact!

ODPH childcare nutrition resources:

- Support you to self-assess and build menus that are balanced and meet nutrition requirements for every season!
- Offer strategies for mealtime success and how to practice responsive feeding

[ODPH Child Care Nutrition Resources](#)



NEW Nutrition in Childcare Nutrition & Menu Planning Course

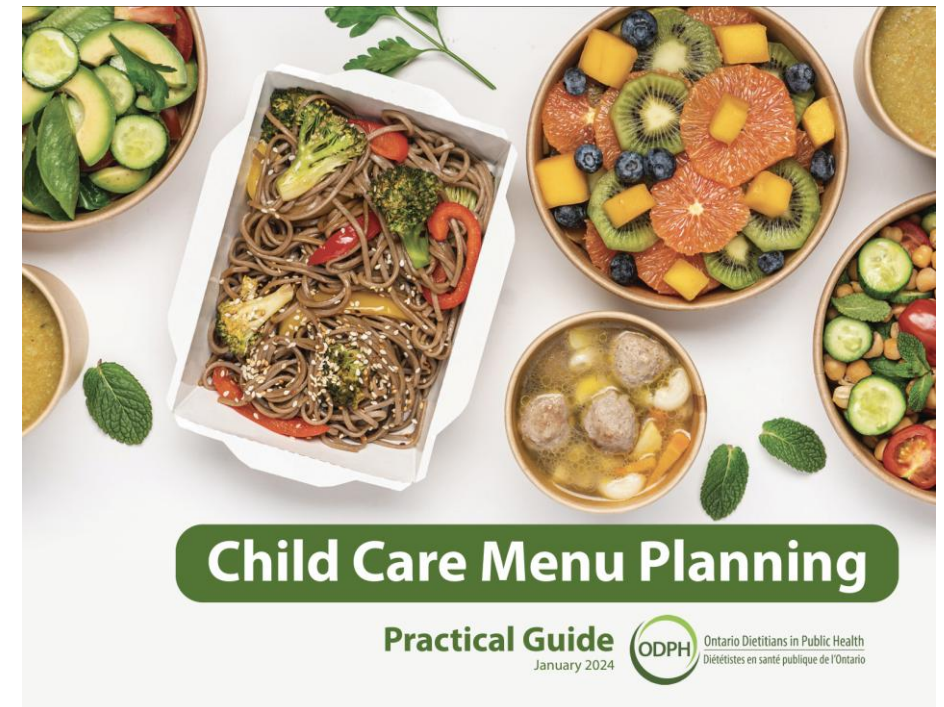
FREE online Nutrition & Menu Planning eModule course designed for childcare cooks and staff to help meet nutrition requirements from the Child Care Early Years Act.

You will learn how to:

- Plan healthy, appealing menus
- Support positive mealtime experiences
- Apply current childcare nutrition best practices

Includes: interactive activities, quizzes, and a printable Certificate of Completion.

Nutrition in Child Care Settings eLearning Course - Ontario Dietitians in Public Health



"What's one idea from today that you'll try with your summer menus?"

- Write your idea on sticky note and post on wall to inspire others!
- These ideas and updated menus will be compiled and sent to this group.



Thank You for Attending!

LakelandsPH.ca

1-844-575-4567

info@lakelandsph.ca

