Thoughtful menu planning will ensure healthy, balanced and nutritious meals. The USDA has outlined the five basic steps of careful menu planning.

**Strive for Balance**
- Balance flavors: Too much of any one flavor will make the plate unappealing for children.
- Balance unhealthy fats: Serve high saturated fat foods with vegetables and fruits.

**Contrast on the Plate** to make meals more appealing. Consider the following:
- Texture
- Taste
- Appearance
- Size and Shape of the Food

**Think about Color**
- Avoid all the same color: Add at least two colors to your plate each meal.
- Fruits and vegetables are great for adding colors from the rainbow.
- Add color to colorless foods: pair mashed potatoes with broccoli.
- Add spices to foods with little color: Paprika or green herbs provide color to white potatoes.

**Emphasize Variety**
- Food Choices: Serve a variety of different meat/meat alternates throughout the week. Try for hamburger one day and chicken the next. The same applies to your side dishes. Provide several options throughout the week.
- Serving Style: There are many different ways to serve healthy foods: casseroles, soups, sandwiches and salads.
- Food Form: Try out different ways of serving meats and vegetables. Prepare vegetables in various ways to include raw, steamed, roasted or in a salad. Vary your spices and seasonings.
- Include a Surprise: Make meal time adventure time. Offer new foods with other foods that children are familiar with.

**Consider Eye Appeal**
- Presentation is Key: If a plate does not look good visually, it is more difficult for a child to want to eat it.
- Consider how food is presented and placed on the table.