

Diet and Nutrition Care Manual

Menu Planning Requirements

The *Dietary Guidelines* are a critical tool used by professionals to help Americans make healthy choices in their daily lives with a goal of preventing chronic disease and enjoying a healthy diet. In an effort to remain current and to assure that menus meet the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025* and MyPlate, the diets in this manual have been adjusted to follow the *Dietary Guidelines*.

Considerations in Menu Planning for Post-acute and Long Term Care Settings

Many professionals are concerned that the volume of food needed to meet the *Guidelines* would be almost impossible for most individuals living in post-acute and long term care settings to consume. Other concerns include customer satisfaction, increased food waste and increased food and labor costs. Planning menus for health care facilities can be challenging especially with person-centered care being an emphasis. Menus must:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribute to quality of life, considering food preferences and personal choice.• Meet regional, cultural and religious preferences (4).• Provide therapeutic diets and consistency alterations with the most individualized and least restrictive diet possible, to encourage intake (5).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide eye-appealing and tasty meals to encourage food intake.• Meet Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs)/Adequate Intakes (AI) for many nutrients. RDAs are the nutrient intake level that meets the requirement for nearly all people in a specific age group/gender. AI is the level of nutrient intake of healthy people assumed to be adequate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet the needs of people who feel the volume of food is overwhelming.• Provide sufficient nutrients for those with acute and chronic illnesses who are at risk for malnutrition and other complications.• Meet all state and federal regulations.
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Food Patterns for Menu Planning and Good Health

Nutrition practitioners often use food patterns to create menus and help assure menu adequacy. It is ideal to use a combination of menu patterns for basic menu development, followed by computerized nutritional analysis. However, not everyone has access to programs that accurately analyze menus for nutritional adequacy. For these reasons, this *Diet and Nutrition Care Manual* uses diet guidelines based on food patterns that were developed using the *Healthy U.S.-Style Dietary Pattern*, *DASH Diet*, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025* and *MyPlate* recommendations.

The use of a menu pattern does not guarantee adequacy of the menu or adequacy of the diet actually consumed. Patterns are generally based on an average nutrient content of foods within each food grouping with a goal of meeting nutrients/food components of public health concern (dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium) and limiting excess sodium, added sugar and saturated fats (1). The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends a menu planning method that considers the *intake* of the group rather than just the food served (some populations may require a target higher than the RDA/AI levels).

A healthful diet can be achieved by following any of the three healthy dietary patterns recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025: Healthy U.S.-Style Dietary Pattern, The Healthy Vegetarian Dietary Pattern and the Healthy Mediterranean-Style Dietary Pattern*. More information on healthy dietary patterns can be found in the *Guidelines* at <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>. Links to sample dietary patterns for several different calorie levels based on these patterns are included in the *Appendix*. The DASH Eating Plan is another example of a healthy dietary pattern (6). See *Chapter 4: Cardiovascular Health* for a full description of the *DASH Diet* and a sample menu.

A menu checklist for health care facilities (both acute and post-acute care) will help ensure nutrition and regulatory requirements are met. A sample menu checklist and lists of Foods and Equivalents for the major food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, protein foods, oils and saturated fats, sugars and alcohol) can be found in the *Appendix*.