

# Meal Comparison

Planning healthy meals can be challenging for anyone, but as child care providers you do this every day, three times a day! When you plan a meal, what do you consider? Fat content, cost, sodium, whether the kids like it, color, and availability? Consider the meal below. Which is a better choice? Why? Note, the menu pictured on the left is commonly seen on menus.



**Total Cost:** \$1.55  
**Total Calories:** 455  
**Total Sodium:** 980 mg  
**Total Sugar:** 7 g  
**Total Fat:** 7 g  
**Total Fiber:** 4 g  
**Total Protein:** 10 g  
**Vitamin C:** 4%  
**Vitamin A:** 0%

*Both of these meals are served with skim milk, which was not added into the nutrition equation.*



**Total Cost:** \$1.55  
**Total Calories:** 175  
**Total Sodium:** 140 mg  
**Total Sugar:** 7 g  
**Total Fat:** 1.5 g  
**Total Fiber:** 7 g  
**Total Protein:** 18 g  
**Vitamin C:** 82%  
**Vitamin A:** 16%

The menu on the left provides fewer nutritional benefits. The meal on the right includes more nutrient rich foods so it provides more nutritional benefits. For example, this meal provided more vitamin A, which is so important for protecting vision and strengthening the immune system. Were you surprised at the cost information? It is nice to know that you can provide nutrition dense meals without breaking the bank!

## Why variety is important in our diets

- Children who eat a variety of healthy foods feel better and are able to enjoy a better quality of life
- Eating a balanced diet also can prevent serious health problems as children grow into adulthood. It's during these earlier years that children develop the habits that they carry into adulthood. We all need a variety of foods from within and across each of the major food groups.
- Different foods provide more of some nutrients than others. So by adding greater variety you provide more vitamins and minerals, creating a strong foundation for providing the key nutrients that are necessary for optimal growth.

It is important for us to remind ourselves that children can only eat what we put in front of them. If you are only serving healthy nutritious foods then kids can only make healthy choices.