

Food and drink ideas

Menu ideas and tips for milk and alternatives



Early childhood services



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Getting enough milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their calcium-rich alternatives during childhood is essential for children to learn, grow and develop.

These foods contain special nutrients such as calcium, protein, B group vitamins and vitamin A and D to build strong healthy bones and teeth, a strong immune system and a healthy heart.



Offer milk, yoghurt, cheese and calcium rich alternatives two to three times a day. This will ensure each child gets the maximum benefits this food group has to offer.

When it comes to menu planning it's common for this food group to fall short in quantity and choosing the right types can be tricky.

Try the tips and menu ideas below to provide variety and meet each child's requirements.



On this page we use the term 'milk and alternatives' to refer to this overall food group of milk, yoghurt, cheese and calcium-fortified alternatives.





Menu planning tips

- ➔ Offer milk and alternatives on the menu two to three times daily. This will ensure each child has a couple of opportunities to eat/drink these foods and get the maximum benefit from them
- ➔ Offer plain milk as a drink for morning tea and afternoon tea
- ➔ Include cheese on fruit and vegetable platters
- ➔ Serve yoghurt or cheese based dips
- ➔ Use cottage cheese, cream cheese, ricotta or yoghurt as a spread for baked items such as fruit bread/raisin toast, pancakes, scones
- ➔ Serve main meals with grated cheese or yoghurt. Consider adding to mashed potato
- ➔ Serve cheese with wholemeal or grainy crackers, or with pita bread as a snack
- ➔ Replace discretionary dairy food such as cream, ice cream or commercially made frozen yoghurt with healthy dairy/calcium rich alternatives.



If a child has a cow's milk allergy it's important they're still provided with calcium rich foods. In addition to removing the cow's milk product for this child when they are in your care, make sure you also include other calcium-rich foods on the menu, such as:

- Soy, rice, oat, nut milk that's been calcium fortified with at least 100mg of calcium per 100ml. Check the nutrition information panel on the carton or bottle's label.
- Canned fish with soft edible bones, such as salmon and sardines. Half a cup of canned salmon provides 400mg of calcium which is the equivalent to 1--1 ½ cups or 250ml of cow's milk.
- Tofu and tempeh products

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Fruit yoghurt popsicles

Blend yoghurt (eg. cows natural, soy) with frozen or fresh seasonal fruit and pour into ice cream moulds. Add an icy pole stick to each mould and freeze.



Fruity morning or afternoon tea ideas

Fruit smoothie

Mix milk of choice (e.g. cows, soy, rice) with yoghurt and fresh or frozen fruit in a blender.

Spiced apple and ricotta toasties

Mix cooked apple, cinnamon and ricotta cheese together. Spoon onto toast and serve or make pockets by spooning onto 10cm wide strips of mountain bread folding into a triangle. Oven-bake until the bread is crunchy.

Yoghurt and fruit salad

For a quick and easy snack serve natural yoghurt with sliced seasonal fruit.

Bircher muesli

This sweet and creamy recipe is ideal for summer menus. Combine rolled oats, milk, cinnamon, grated apple, nuts and/or seeds (e.g almonds, pepitas and sunflower seeds if allowed) and cover with orange juice. Refrigerate preferably overnight. Serve with fruit and yoghurt (e.g. cows natural or soy).

Soft fruity porridge

This makes a delicious wintery treat the kids will love! Over low heat, simmer rolled oats, milk (eg. cows, soy, rice) and spices such as ground cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and/or cardamon. Stir in chopped seasonal fruit such as apples, pears, rhubarb and once softened and the oats have thickened it's ready to serve.

Rice milk custard

This recipe may be suitable for children with various food allergies or intolerances.



Savoury goodies

Bruschetta

Top wholegrain toast with ricotta or mozzarella, slices of tomato and basil leaves.

Spinach and ricotta pockets

Squeeze out excess liquid from defrosted, frozen spinach. Mix spinach with cooked onion, ricotta and basil leaves. Spoon mixture into wrap/mountain bread or filo pastry, fold into triangles and bake until golden and crisp.

Confetti quesadillas

Sprinkle half a tortilla with cheese, corn, chopped capsicum, and black beans. Cover with other half and press down. Bake in oven until cheese is melted.

Pinwheels

Cut crusts from wholemeal bread and flatten with a rolling pin. Spread with cream cheese and top with lettuce, ribbons of carrot and cucumber. Roll bread up firmly and cut into rounds. Mountain bread works well too!

Creamy dips

Pineapple and yoghurt dip

Drain crushed pineapple and mix with natural yoghurt of choice. Serve with sliced fruit.

Tzatziki dip

Squeeze out excess liquid from grated cucumber. Mix with natural yoghurt, crushed garlic, cumin and lemon juice. Serve with veggie sticks, crackers, corn thins or crispbread.

Garlic and herb dip

Mix cream cheese, natural yoghurt, garlic, chives and lemon juice until smooth. Serve with veggie sticks, crackers, corn thins or crispbread.

Creamy spinach dip

Squeeze excess water out of defrosted, frozen spinach. Blend with chopped shallots, cream cheese, cottage cheese, natural yoghurt and lemon juice. Serve with veggie sticks, crackers, corn thins or crispbread.



Delicious Tzatziki dip. Perfect with veggie sticks, crackers, corn thins or crispbread.

Sweet cottage cheese dip

Blend cottage cheese with cinnamon and a tiny amount of honey. Natural yoghurt works well too! Serve dip with fruit or on muesli or use as a spread for raisin/fruit toast, pikelets or scones.



Cheese and veggie muffins

Cheesy muffins are a great way to get children to enjoy veggies. This calls for spinach however you can increase its veggie variety by also adding corn, capsicum, sweet potato and/or carrot.