

CUSTOMIZING BASIC MENUS TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

HM Composite BASIC menus are followed by over 100 facilities in California. Menus are written by Registered Dietitians of H.M. Composite with many years of experience in long term care. Each menu cycle is revised according to:

- Facility input through Quality Assurance calls and formal menu questionnaires.
- Trends in the market – new cost effective menu items available.
- Increased ethnic mix of client census.

BASIC menus are non-selective. However, each Dinner and Supper meal lists a suggested alternative. A dining room poster is provided advising residents of substitute menu items available, to residents who refuse a meal as served. In addition, each facility is responsible to keep current *Dislike Lists*. For example, a resident who does not like fish must be served an alternate entree.

Once a facility receives their menu shipment, in-house changes may be made, with approval by the Registered Dietitian. This may be a simple process when the same ingredients are used. The greatest controversy of menu acceptance is ethnic based. In California we have large numbers of Hispanic and Asian residents. However, concentrations of ethnic groups is geographic, rather than spread out evenly. Consequently, five facilities in one city may want more Mexican food while 150 miles away Mexican food is not desired. Since BASIC menus are served throughout California this becomes a challenge!

Keep Key Ingredients; CHANGE Recipes

BASIC menus utilize a limited number of key ingredients that are incorporated into numerous recipes to provide menu variety. The fewer key ingredients a facility needs to purchase, the better food cost can be controlled.

Ethnic food served in a nursing home is basically American food with sauce and spice variations. These variations, spices especially, can just as easily be removed. The following table lists key ingredients and names of ethnic dishes with American food substitutes. Italian food is not listed because almost all residents enjoy lasagna, raviolies, and even soft pizza.

SUGGESTED MENU SUBSTITUTIONS

| Name of Menu Item | | Suggested American Foods |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Ethnic Food | American Variation | |
| Key Ingredient: Pork or Beef | | |
| Sweet and sour pork | Cubed pork with fruit sauce | |
| Teriyaki pork | Sauced pork with mushrooms | |
| Asian pork or beef roast | Pork or beef roast with brown gravy | |
| Pork or beef chop suey | Pork or beef cubes with apricot sauce plus mixed vegetables | |
| Chili Verde or Chili Colorado | Cubed pork or beef with gravy or BB-Q | |
| Beef or pork enchilada or burrito | Roast or cubed pork or beef with potato or rice side dish plus bread | |
| Spanish rice with beef | Beef patty with buttered rice and stewed tomatoes | |
| Key Ingredient: Poultry | | |
| Chicken in Adobo sauce | Baked chicken with poultry gravy | |
| Chicken Teriyaki | BB-Q chicken | |
| Key Ingredient: Fish | | |
| Sweet and sour fish | Fish fillets with tartar sauce | |
| Tuna patty with dill sauce | Turkey patty with cream gravy | |
| Snapper Vera Cruz | Fried fish with cocktail sauce | |
| Key Ingredient: Beans | | |
| Chili con carne | Salisbury steak with tomato sauce plus rice, potatoes or pasta | |
| Baked or lima beans with ham | Scalloped potatoes or macaroni and cheese with diced ham | |
| Key Ingredient: Vegetables and Starch | | |
| Asian vegetable stir fry or Oriental mixed vegetables | Buttered zucchini, etc., or whatever is the key vegetable in the mixture | |
| Steamed rice | Buttered rice | |
| Mexican rice | Rice pilaf | |
| Refried beans | Rice, potatoes or pasta | |
| Key Ingredient: Bread | | |
| Tortilla and margarine | Bread and margarine | |
| Petite egg roll | Bread and margarine | |

The previous chart also allows you to make American food ethnic. Just follow the chart in reverse, from right to left. In general, soy sauce is part of Asian food and chili powder and frequently cumin, is part of Mexican food.

Suggestions for Preparing Ethnic Food:

- Save ethnic recipes from each menu cycle to create your own file. Or, contact The Composite for more, especially, Mexican recipes.
- For only one or two residents, prepare a larger amount of a particular ethnic food and freeze individual portions. For example, prepare twelve chicken enchiladas, chill, then carefully wrap separate enchiladas in plastic and freeze for later use.
- Interview the resident(s) to determine if some ethnic condiments would please them. For example, perhaps individual packets of soy sauce for Asian residents or salsa for Mexican residents.
- Provide a favorite ethnic food daily for a few residents. For example, rice three times a day and/or tortillas instead of bread.

It is important to serve meals liked by your residents. By following these simple suggestions, adjusting menus should be easy. By keeping the *Key Ingredients* the same, food cost will remain almost the same. Adjusting menus to meet the needs of your residents ultimately meets everyone's goal – meals eaten!