



CULINARY CONNECTION

THINKING OUTSIDE THE STANDARD MENU LINEUP

BY KRISTIN KLINEFELTER, MS, RDN, LDN

I SMILED FROM EAR TO EAR as I read the May 4th menu at the hospital cafeteria. I ordered the General Hux Tauntaun bowl and somehow it tasted even better than the normal General Tso Bowl that I typically order (although it was the exact same menu item). I'm not even a Star Wars fanatic and this meal made my day! I was impressed by the efforts of the cafeteria team embracing this popular "holiday" with menu branding based on the blockbuster movies.

Adding that extra pizzazz to your menu cycle takes effort. However, the amount of effort compared to the day-brightening effect it can have on staff and clients is well worth it. These efforts do not have to cost extra money, but they do need a creative, energetic team to support them. Do you have a menu revamp champion in you? Maybe you don't have the time or energy, but does someone on your team? Provided here are some fun ideas for you to think outside your standard menu lineup.

REGULATIONS

Before we explore options, let's cover a few rules that some facility menu revisions have to comply with. If you are in long-term care, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations state: *The facility must provide each resident with a nourishing, palatable, well-balanced diet that meets his or her daily nutritional and special dietary needs, taking into consideration the preferences of each resident. (c) Menus and nutritional adequacy. Menus must— (1) Meet the nutritional needs of residents in accordance with established national guidelines; (2) Be prepared in advance; (3) Be followed; (4) Reflect, based on a facility's reasonable efforts, the religious, cultural, and ethnic needs of the resident population, as well as input received from residents and resident groups; (5) Be updated periodically; (6) Be reviewed by the facility's dietitian or other clinically qualified nutrition professional for nutritional adequacy; and (7) Nothing in this paragraph should be construed to limit the resident's right to make personal dietary choices. In addition, each resident receives and the facility provides— (1) Food prepared by methods that conserve nutritive value, flavor, and appearance; (2) Food and drink that is palatable, attractive, and at a safe and appetizing temperature; (3) Food prepared in a form designed to meet individual needs; (4) Food that accommodates resident allergies, intolerances, and preferences; (5) Appealing options of similar nutritive value to residents who choose not to eat food that is initially served*

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or who request a different meal choice; and (6) Drinks, including water and other liquids consistent with resident needs and preferences and sufficient to maintain resident hydration (2016).

Next, remember the CMS rule that you may not have more than 14 hours between meals in long-term care. If a nourishing snack is provided at bedtime, you may extend the time lapse to 16 hours. The definition of a nourishing snack is ‘a verbal offering of single items or in combination from the basic food groups.’ Remember to check your individual state’s regulations regarding what snacks must be offered at bedtime. This rule might come into play if you are serving “lupper” (late lunch/early supper) at around 3:30 pm. Lupper works well on brunch days. Let’s imagine you have a

facility-wide family picnic on Saturday at 3:30 pm. On Friday evening, dinner can be at 5:30 pm, HS snack at 7:00 pm, Saturday brunch at 9:30 am, lunch at 12:30 pm, the picnic (lupper) at 3:30 pm, HS snack Saturday at 7:00 pm, and get back to your regularly scheduled breakfast at 7:30 am on Sunday.

Finally, as always, we must *store, prepare, distribute, and serve food in accordance with professional standards for food service safety* at all times.

Now for the fun stuff! We have an important job because food can bring joy to peoples’ lives. Meals are often what people look forward to most in their day, no matter their age or lifestyle. Adding the element of fun and surprise, or using food to recognize special days is not only doable, but encouraged.

CELEBRATING UNIQUE HOLIDAYS

The hospital cafeteria embracing May 4th day is an example of celebrating unique holidays. They simply changed the names of typical menu items to Star Wars-themed monikers. I give a huge high five and credit to the culinary team at Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital in Grand Rapids, Minn., for this creative menu lineup: Jawa Juice (flavor-enhanced water), Amidala Coruscant (almond croissant), General Hux Tauntaun bowl (General Tso Bowl), Outer Rim Sarlacc Salad (southwestern salad), Porg ala Palpatine (Chicken a la King), Tusken Raider Soup (Tuscan soup), Wookiee Cookie, and Brewbacca (coffee).

Another unique holiday from popular culture is “Pi Day” on March 14 (3.14).

ARTICLE REFERENCES

CMS Regulations Home - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services | CMS
National Food Day Calendar National Food Days 2023 {Free Printable Calendar} - The Storied Recipe

Celebrate Pi Day with a pie baking contest or a pie buffet! I don't suggest a pie eating contest, as it is a choking hazard, but a pie in the face of your favorite good-natured administrator might be fun for the clients to witness. Note: please gain their permission first.

Finally, there is a "food holiday" for nearly every day of the year, including National Waffle Day (August 24), National Ice Cream Day (July 16), and National Chicken Fried Steak Day (October 26). A free, printable list of all National Food Holidays is provided in the Article References section.

CREATIVE MEAL OPTIONS

Creative meal options can be a regularly planned event, or focused on special days. Whether it is brunch or supper from the aforementioned examples, one of the suggestions below, or something your creative brain comes up with, remember to verify that your idea meets all criteria for the population you serve.

Snacky Lunch

As long as each meal component (food group) is represented, it is OK to serve a snacky lunch. Examples include:

- Sliced apples, cheese stick, baby carrots with ranch dressing, nuts, and a smoothie
- Crackers, turkey slices, cheese, pineapple chunks, cucumber slices, hummus, and water
- Yogurt parfait (yogurt, granola, berries, almonds), and cherry tomatoes with mozzarella cheese cubes

Rainbow Meal

Serve an item from each color of the rainbow. For example: Chicken (white) with cranberry sauce (red), cantaloupe (orange), creamed corn (yellow), roasted broccoli (green), blueberry & blackberry cobbler (blue and indigo). You can also try the color theme using only one hue, even though this goes against our standard meal planning principles. Think: Baked salmon,

CREATIVE MEAL OPTIONS

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roasted beets, raspberries over rice pudding, boiled baby red potatoes, and chilled cranberry juice cocktail. Monochromatic, yes! Something for people to talk about, for sure!

Brown Bag Lunch

A nostalgic trip down memory lane will likely bring a smile. You might spark conversation between retired individuals about "the good old days" when they packed lunches for their

kids, or had lunch on the tractor or their jobsite.

Celebrity Chefs or Servers

Engage administration, department chairs, principals, or community members and "hire" them to prepare menu items, work the service line, or provide dining room service.

Elevated Themed Meals

Most foodservice operators write-in traditional holiday and cultural meals. You can elevate these experiences with decorations, trivia or conversation starter cards, and costumes. On special days, staff can wear themed t-shirts or fun aprons that are visually pleasing to your guests. Wouldn't your clients love seeing you walk into the dining room wearing a kilt on St. Patrick's Day? OK, so maybe one of your staff can wear the kilt. What about a Birthday Girl sash or Birthday Boy pin for clients to wear on their birthdays? Don't worry, just getting the meal served on time is your priority so you can involve the activities department in these decor and costume ideas.

SUMMING IT UP

However crazy your ideas might seem at first, there might be a way to work some element of excitement and flair into your menu lineup in even small ways. Dream big and engage your team. You might just make someone's (or 100 someone's) day! 🍷



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Kristin Klinefelter has worked in education and health care since 1998. She has not watched all of the Star Wars movies yet, but plans to after eating the themed meal on May 4th.

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This **Level II** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to facilitate application of knowledge into practice by drawing connections among ideas and using information in new situations.



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1. It is acceptable if themed meals provide poor nutritional quality, as long as they are fun.
A. True
B. False
2. Which of the following statements best describes the reason we should be creative with menu planning?
A. Food brings joy to people's lives
B. Humans get bored easily
C. Nutrients are best absorbed if people are happy when eating
3. Which step must you take when changing a menu item?
A. Notify your staff and order the necessary items
B. Post the menu change for clients to see
C. Both A and B
4. If you serve a meal that is monochromatic, nutrition quality will suffer.
A. True
B. False
5. According to CMS regulations, if you modify your meal schedule, how many hours can lapse between meals if an HS snack is served?
A. 12 hours
B. 14 hours
C. 16 hours
6. Who can you involve in developing creative menu additions?
A. Foodservice staff
B. Activities department staff
C. Both A and B
7. Which statement is *false* about being creative with themed meals?
A. They will cost you more money
B. They may take the same amount of preparation time as your traditional meal
C. They must comply with food safety regulations

