

Meal Planning



Planning meals has many benefits. You will eat fewer restaurant and fast-food meals and save money. You can control what you eat and how much you eat. You can prepare food ahead of time for busy days and enjoy more meals as a family.

Are you ready to get organized and stick to a healthy eating plan? Keep reading for tips that can help you stay on track!

Ten Tips to Help You Get Organized

#1: Plan Your Future Meals on a Weekly or Monthly Basis

If possible, involve the whole family in planning. Ask family members what they would like to eat, or sit down and make a plan together. Use a calendar to stay organized, and set a reasonable weekly or monthly food budget.

#2: Collect Healthy Recipes

Buy a cookbook, borrow one from a friend, or check one out from the library. Many Web sites offer healthy recipes, too. Save the recipes you like in a binder or folder, or bookmark them on your computer.

#3: Make a Shopping List

Start the list by noting the ingredients you need for the recipes you plan to cook. Organize the list by how you travel the aisles of the grocery store. Check your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer to make sure you do not overbuy.

To save time, create a standard shopping list and check off the items you need to buy on your next trip to the store. If you have a smart phone, try an app that allows you to add recipes to your “favorite” folder and then generates a shopping list.

#4: Assign Meals to Specific Days

A schedule can help you stay organized and relaxed. For example, if you work late every Friday, then plan a simple meal that needs little preparation, like homemade pizza.

#5: Invest in the Proper Cooking Tools

Be sure that you have the tools you need before you start planning what to cook.

#6: Schedule Your Shopping

Set aside at least an hour each week to shop for food. Give yourself enough time to read food labels and make healthy choices.

#7: Start Slow

Meal planning can be overwhelming at first. Begin by choosing a few simple recipes and planning one week of menus.

Get familiar with the first recipes you chose, and then try new ones. Once you are comfortable with the process, you can make a meal plan for a longer time period (for example, meals for an entire month).

#8: Shop for Bargains

If you see a sale on expensive ingredients that you enjoy, like meat or fish, buy them. You can plan meals around these ingredients for the week, or freeze them for later use.

#9: Gather Your Ingredients

Each day (or the evening before), take out the ingredients you need for a recipe. Thaw frozen items like meat in the refrigerator, not at room temperature.

If you are missing any ingredients, you may not need to run to the store. Consider making a substitution in the recipe, or recheck your recipe collection. Can you make something else with the ingredients you have?

#10: Keep a Well-Stocked Pantry

Identify the ingredients you use often. Then make sure you always have them on hand.

