

Meal Planning

We all live busy, chaotic lives. The last thing we want to think about after an exhausting day is what to have for dinner. Meal planning can help you save time and money while enjoying all your favorite foods.

What is Meal Planning?

Meal planning is simply the act of choosing meals in advance. This can look different for every person, and it can take some trial and error to figure out what works best for you or your family.

For some, meal planning may be planning out every single meal for the entire week. For others, it may be thinking about what you have to prepare the day before for dinner. Whatever meal planning may look like for you, it still offers a variety of benefits.

What are the benefits of Meal Planning?

- Save your precious time and energy
- Save money you would spend on eating out
- Give you the opportunity to try new recipes
- Reduce food waste
- Enjoy nourishing foods throughout the week

How do I Meal Plan?

As I mentioned before, meal planning will look different for everyone. Don't overcomplicate it. As you start out, be open to trying different ways of meal planning to find what works best for you.

1. One of the most crucial steps to meal planning is to **think about your schedule**. Will you be eating the meal at home? Will you need to take it to go? How much time will you have to cook before the meal? Does it need to be prepped the night before? Each of these questions could play into what you decide to eat. On days when you are less busy, you could do more cooking and prep work for other days. If your entire week is going to be very busy, you might want to consider quick-prep meals.
2. **Look for meal ideas**. This part can be tricky when we're not used to making a variety of meals. Pinterest always has so many ideas of quick and easy meals, or you could look at magazines or cookbooks for inspiration. When thinking of ideas, remember you might not need a new idea for each meal; some days you may have leftovers for your meal.
3. **Write out your meal plan**. For some you may determine a specific meal for each day. For others you may make a list of 4-5 different meals you know you will make during the week but will have flexibility with which day you have that meal. However you go about doing this, writing it out will help you visualize, plan, and stay organized.

4. **Make your grocery list.** Consider what you already have in your pantry and determine what you need from the grocery store. You may find you can reduce food waste by choosing meal ideas that have similar components.
5. **Do any prepping.** After grocery shopping, think about what you could prep ahead to save your time. Wash, chop, and store any fruits and vegetables, cook pasta ahead of time for pasta salad, etc.
6. **Set aside time.** Designate the times when you will cook and prepare your meals. Thinking ahead will give you the space you need to adequately prepare and ensure you have something planned for each meal.

Meal planning does take time and effort, but it will save you in the long run. Have fun with it, set aside time each week, and be patient as you find what works best for you. Your future self will thank you!