

Lesson 11

Meal Planning, Preparation, & Budgeting



Benefits of Meal Preparation and Planning

Eating healthy meals can feel like a big task when life is busy. Even getting groceries in the house can be hard. Because of this, it can feel easy to instead rely on fast food and convenience store meals. These meals usually cost more and are not as healthy. This lesson will give you simple tips on how to save time and money while planning nutrition-packed meals.



Making Life Easier with Meal Planning

Meal planning may sound like something that will make your life feel harder. But if you take it step-by-step and build the habit over time, you will find that meal planning can make your week much easier.



Why Plan Ahead?

We have to make decisions every day, all day long. You may make it to dinner time and feel too tired from the day to make another decision about what to eat. It is hard to make the best decision for your health when you feel this way.

But, if you have previously planned your meals for the week, then the decision is already made. You simply follow the plan that you made earlier in the week.

Make planning easier by keeping these 5 things in mind:

BUDGET: How much money would you like to spend on groceries for the week?

TIME: How much time do you have to prepare meals? This helps you decide between time-intensive meals versus fast and simple meals.

FOOD: What foods do you already have in the house? For example, if you plan to make pasta one night, check to see if you already have enough pasta on hand. Then cross that off your list! What other foods do you need to buy to make these meals?

PORTIONS & LEFTOVERS: One meal can provide enough food for multiple meals! One dinner could create multiple dinners and/or lunches.

LOCATION: Is getting to a grocery store difficult for you? See if you can buy your groceries online for delivery. Or perhaps you are going to a doctor's appointment that is located down the street from a grocery store. Plan your grocery shopping and meals around when you will be near a grocery store to prevent extra trips.



Prevent meal time stress with these two key steps below!

Shop Your Plan

Take your meal plan and grocery list with you to the store. That way, you can adapt your plan if the store is out of the food that you need or you find a lower cost option and want to make a quick change. Just because you made a plan doesn't mean you can't change it! If you see something on sale, update your meal plan, and keep shopping.



Share Your Plan

If you live with family members or have roommates that you eat with, sharing your meal plan is key. This makes sure that everyone in the house is on the same page and can help prevent important ingredients from going “missing” during the week if someone else gets hungry. It can also prevent the “what are we having for dinner” question.



Meal and Ingredient Prep Ideas:

Having pre-prepped ingredients comes in handy for times when you feel too tired to cook. If you follow the ideas below, all you have to do is heat and eat!

Pre-chop and wash carrots, celery and cucumbers and store in the fridge:

- Pair with your favorite dressing or dip for a simple, quick snack.
- Use as salad toppings for an easy side dish or meal.

Wash and chop bell peppers and onions and store in the fridge:

- Use them in omelets to add veggies into your morning.
- Add to salads, tacos, soups, or frozen meals for a boost of veggies.

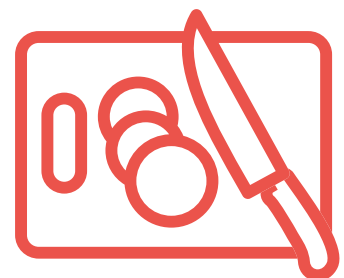
Store drained canned beans in the fridge (rinse to help cut down on extra salt):

- Use as a quick protein for salads, tacos, or pasta dishes.
- Toss into soups or frozen meals to add extra protein and fiber.

Bake potatoes, sweet potatoes or winter squash and store in the fridge:

- Use as a quick side for breakfast, lunch, or dinner!

Top potatoes with shredded chicken and low-fat cheese for a quick meal.



Bake a couple of chicken thighs or breasts at the beginning of the week:

- Use as a quick protein for salads, wraps, sandwiches, pasta dishes, and tacos.
- Try cooking chicken with simple spices like pepper and garlic. This way you can add different sauces when ready to eat so you never get bored!

Prepare hard boiled eggs ahead of time and store in the fridge:

- Pair with a piece of fruit for the perfect on-the-go breakfast, lunch, or snack.



Preparing for Meals To-Go

Do you make meals to eat outside the house? You can easily plan for these meals too. Having containers you can reuse can make these meals much easier to prepare. You can buy new containers or use old ones. You can even save ones from the store or restaurants. Yogurt and cottage cheese containers, for example, are perfect for quick options like oatmeal, chili, or rice. Jam or jelly jars are great for taking salad dressing on the go and not spilling it in your bag.



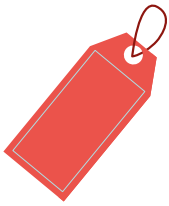
Ways to Save when Meal Planning



1. Enjoy a vegetarian meal at least once a week. Animal proteins like beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, and fish, usually cost more than plant proteins. Try beans, lentils, and tofu for low-cost, fiber-rich dinner options.



2. Eggs are another good option for one meal a week. Eggs are usually lower in cost per meal compared to animal meat and work well for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.



3. Compare name brands with store brands. Often store brands are similar in flavor and nutrition, but cost much less.



4. Use the bulk bins when available for foods like oats, rice, nuts, or dried beans. The price per pound is almost always lower than pre-packaged options.



5. Love leftovers? Cooking a little extra so that you have enough food for lunch or dinner the next day saves time and money by cutting down on the different foods you need to get at the store.



6. Avoid unique ingredients. Sometimes a recipe will call for a tiny portion of unique and expensive food. Often you can skip that item altogether or use an alternative to save money.

My Meal Planning & Prep

1) How could meal planning help you support your health goals?

2) Let's try planning ahead for at least two meals this upcoming week!
What meals would you like to plan?

Example: "I will plan 3 different breakfasts I can rotate for the next two weeks"

All Meal Ideas

Two Meals to Plan for Next Week!

1.

2.

3) What will you need to make planning your life and schedule?

Example: " I will check my fridge and cupboards for ingredients I already have before planning meals this week."
