

Guide to Meal Planning

Meal planning can save *tons* of time in the kitchen and help make sure you always have good quality, balanced meals available to eat on a daily basis.

Here's how to meal prep in 4 easy steps!

STEP 1: CHECK YOUR CALENDAR

- **Start by figuring out how many breakfasts, lunches, and dinners will you need for the upcoming week.**
- Knowing exactly when you'll need meals and when you won't helps you plan more efficiently and avoid wasting food.
- Factor in things like dates, meals with clients, and travel, when you likely won't be eating home cooked meals.
- You may need to think about others in your family as well, such as a spouse or children, when determining what quantities of food to prepare for.

STEP 2: MAKE A MENU

- **Once you know how many meals you'll need for the week, it's time to decide what to eat for those meals.**
- Make sure all your meals have appropriate amounts of protein, carbs and fats depending on your goals, and that most (if not all) meals have some veggies in them.
- Get creative. Prepping a couple of ingredients in bulk is easier than cooking different ones for every night of the week. But eating the same stuff over and over is boring, so think about how you can use ingredients in different ways.
- Take advantage of leftovers. There's no rule that says you have to eat something different every day! One easy way to cut down on meal prep is by doubling your dinner recipe and bringing half for lunch the next day.
- Keep it simple. You don't have to cook like you're on Top Chef. The less complicated your meals are, the easier it'll be to prep them.

STEP 3: GO FOOD SHOPPING

- **With your meals and recipes lined up, it's time to make a shopping list and head to the grocery store.**
- Aim to do your big weekly shop on Saturday or early Sunday, so you have time to prep your ingredients on Sunday before the work/school week begins.
- To get in and out as fast as possible, use a shopping list and check off items as you add them to your cart.
- If making your own list, organize your grocery list by section (produce, meat, dairy, etc.). You'll be less likely to forget stuff or have to waste time backtracking to different areas of the store.

STEP 4: PREP AND PACK YOUR FOOD

- **Now it's time to prep, cook, and pack your food!**
- Block out time on the weekend to get your ingredients ready for weekday meal assembly. Once the week starts, there's a greater chance that the prep just won't happen.
- Prep your ingredients. No matter what's on the menu, you can always find a way to prep components of it ahead of time.
 - Proteins: Roast, bake, or poach poultry, meat, or fish.
 - Produce: Steam or roast vegetables in a big batch, bake potatoes or sweet potatoes, and wash and chop raw fruits and vegetables for salads and snacking.
 - Other ingredients: Make sauces, dressings, or dips, and any other items on your list.
- Assemble and combine what you can. You may choose to create complete to-go meals or store individual meal components separately for later combinations.
 - Be careful with meals like leafy salads which can get soggy if they sit in the fridge all week. If you're having those things for lunch, assemble them the night before.
- Store smart. Pack food in clear glass or BPA-free plastic containers so you can access them easily and know exactly how much you have.

- Refrigerate cooked ingredients you'll use within 2 to 3 days; freeze the rest and thaw them later in the week. Divide single servings of finished dishes into individual containers for easy portion control.