



Meal Planning 101

Do you arrive home most days feeling ravenous but too tired to cook? Are you frustrated with spending so much money for restaurant or take-out meals? Do you wander aimlessly in the aisles of the supermarket filling your cart with impulse buys? If any of this sounds familiar, read on . . .

Having a supply of simple, nutritious foods in your cupboards, fridge and freezer will allow you to make quick & nutritious meals while staying on your budget. All you need is a little **planning and organization**:

- ❖ **Make a shopping list.** Include items you will need for meals and snacks for a week or 10 days. It's helpful to keep a running list on the fridge and add items as you use them up. Check out store ads for specials but only buy what you need!
- ❖ **Think of 3 or 4 main meals you can make during the week.** Plan on cooking extra portions of some items to use in other meals. For example, cook several chicken breasts at one time to be used in sandwiches, pasta dishes, salads or soups. Cooked meats can be stored safely in the fridge for up to 4 days.
- ❖ **Vary your meals and include different colors, flavor and textures.** Surf the web for recipes; check out: www.deliciousdecisions.org/cb, www.mealmakeovermoms.com/recipes, www.mnsu.edu/shs/healtheducation/bmc, www.publix.com/aprons/meals/SimpleMeals.do , www.aicr.org or look for recipe books on cooking for one or two.



- ❖ **Don't shop when you are hungry!** Have a meal or snack before you hit the supermarket to avoid impulse buys that may be expensive and unhealthy.
- ❖ **Read the food labels.** Look for foods that are low in saturated and trans fats, high in dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals and moderate in calories and sodium. Include **lots** of fruits & vegetables along with some whole grains, lean meats, beans and low-fat dairy. Go easy on "snack" foods like chips, cookies, ice cream and candy. Wash & cut up some fruits & veggies right away so you can easily grab them for a healthy snack.
- ❖ **Share cooking and meals.** Start a "supper club". One day a week have two or three friends over & take turns making a main dish. Have everyone bring a side dish or beverage. Meals are generally more pleasant and satisfying when eaten with others.



Meal Time Savers

- **Cook once, serve twice** – Many food items (rice, pasta, chicken, meats, etc.) can be prepared in larger batches to be used another day in a completely different dish. For example: roast a chicken (or buy one at the supermarket) to serve at one meal; chop up the leftover meat & use it for a pasta dish, stir-fry, soup, wrap sandwich or main dish salad. Cooked meats can be stored safely in the frig for 2 – 3 days or frozen for several months.



- **Load up the Crock-Pot in the morning** & come home to a delicious ready-to-eat meal – There are healthy crock-pot recipes available on the web; try <http://busycooks.about.com/od/healthycrockpotrecipes/a/healthycrockpot.htm> for ideas. Slow-cooking makes foods moist & flavorful so very lean meat choices (skinless poultry, beef sirloin or round steak, pork tenderloin), most vegetables, and dried beans and peas are perfect for this cooking method. Pasta and rice tend to get mushy in the crock-pot so cook them separately shortly before serving. If you're short on time in the mornings – load the crock the night before & refrigerate overnight.
- **Fish is “fast food”** – Fish can be broiled, grilled, baked or microwaved in as little as 5 – 10 minutes. Fish is done when the flesh appears opaque and measures 145° when tested with a thermometer; don't overcook your fish –it will be dry! Look in the frozen section of the supermarket for marinated fillets (such as Gorton's) that can be cooked from frozen in 15 – 20 min.
- **Cruise the frozen foods aisle for quick, healthy meal items** – There are dozens of frozen items that will make your meal preparation easier on days you are short on time. Look for frozen diced bell peppers and onions, frozen vegetable mixes, chicken breasts, marinated frozen fish fillets, “complete meals” like **Bird's Eye Voila** garlic chicken, teriyaki beef or chicken and shrimp penne; **Gourmet Dining** stir-fry chicken or pork, seafood medley, garlic chicken; and **Lean Cuisine** dinner selects.
- **Make it meatless** – Mix & heat precooked pasta or rice, drained canned beans, diced canned tomatoes, frozen vegetables and your favorite spices (try a *Mrs. Dash* seasoning mix) for a quick & filling meal or serve “breakfast” for dinner . . . a veggie omelet, poached eggs & ham on English muffins or waffles & fruit.

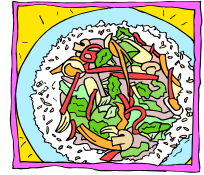


Stock your kitchen with the basics . . .



Cupboard staples

- **Soups** – choose broth-based soups with vegetable and beans for a quick snack or meal side dish. Most canned soups have only 100 – 120 calories per cup and Healthy Choice brand has much less sodium than other brands. To make your “Ramen” healthier and more filling, add ½-1 cup frozen mixed vegetables and use only ½ of the flavoring packet.
- **Beans and lentils** – canned varieties (black, pinto, refried) can be added to pasta or rice dishes, soups and stews, soft tacos & burritos or served as a main dish. Try low-fat canned chili on top of a baked potato for a tasty, quick meal. Beans are a good source of dietary fiber, minerals, phytochemicals and protein.
- **Whole wheat or wheat blend pasta** – pasta is quick and easy to prepare. Top with prepared tomato-based pasta sauce or sautéed vegetables. Time-saving tip - cook an extra portion or two and store in an airtight container for up to 4 days. To reheat, place in boiling water for 1 minute.
- **Quick cooking brown rice** – great base for a stir-fry, casserole or soup. To reheat leftover rice, add 2 Tbsp. water to each cup of cooked rice and heat in a covered microwaveable dish for 2 – 4 minutes.
- **Canned fish and meats** – canned tuna, salmon and chicken breast in water are great for making sandwiches & wraps or can be added to casseroles, salads and stir-fries.
- **Fruit** – choose fruit canned in water, juice or light syrup for times when you just can’t get to the supermarket to buy fresh. Small cans are great to take along for healthy snacks and will satisfy your sweet tooth.
- **Vegetables** – keep a variety of canned vegetables on hand to add to casseroles, soups and pasta dishes or for a side dish. Pour off the liquid in the can and rinse the vegetables with water before heating to remove some of the salt.
- **Cereals and breads** – choose whole grain, low sugar varieties. Your bread, buns & tortillas should have 2 – 3 g of dietary fiber per serving and cereal should have 5 g of fiber or more per serving. If you have a sweet tooth, try mixing a small portion of sweetened cereal with an unsweetened one to lessen the sugar load.
- **Flavorings & condiments** – keep some olive and/or canola on hand for sautéing or to make salad dressings; ketchup, “light” mayo and any mustard for spreading; herbs and spices such as cinnamon, curry, thyme, rosemary, basil, garlic powder & pepper and hot sauce, soy sauce & stir-fry sauce to add flavor to your dishes.
- **Nuts** – peanut butter, nuts (almonds, walnuts, peanuts), and soy “nuts” contain healthy fats and will add flavor and protein to your meals and snacks.



In the Fridge

- **Dairy** – keep a supply of fat-free or 1% milk, light yogurt and low-fat cheese on hand to get your 3 servings per day.
- **Eggs** – enjoy in a breakfast burrito, veggie omelet or fried egg and ham sandwich. Eggs are an inexpensive high-quality protein source. For breakfast on the run, hard boil 3 or 4 eggs at a time and store in the fridge for up to a week. (Fresh eggs in the shell can be safely stored for 2 – 3 weeks in the fridge.)
- **Fresh meats & poultry and deli meats** – choose lean cuts such as 90 – 95% leanground beef, loin and round cuts of pork and beef, skinless chicken breasts and thighs, turkey breast and 98% fat-free deli turkey, ham and roast beef. These products are highly perishable and should be frozen if not used within 2 – 3 days of purchase.
- **Fresh fruits and vegetables** – most will last longer if stored in the fridge; exceptions are bananas and tomatoes which should be kept at room temp on the counter. Keep a variety of colorful choices on hand – dark green lettuce & spinach, red & yellow bell peppers, carrots, onions, garlic, sweet potatoes, broccoli, oranges, apples, kiwi, grapes (when in season), etc.
- **Margarine** – choose a soft spread with no trans fatty acids (check the label).

In the Freezer

- **Breads** – to decrease waste, you can store loaves of bread, pita bread and tortillas in the freezer and thaw in the microwave as needed.
- **Fruits** – keep some frozen berries (blueberries, strawberries, raspberries or berry blends) around to make smoothies or for a healthy snack. To thaw, run under cold water for 1 – 2 minutes.
- **Vegetables** – healthy choices are mixes like broccoli and carrots, stir-fry mix and good old “mixed” vegetables (corn, peas, carrots and green beans). Avoid frozen veggies with cheese, butter or creamy sauces. Most frozen vegetables only take 5 – 6 minutes to prepare in the microwave.
- **Frozen fish and poultry** – most skinless, boneless chicken breasts can be cooked from the frozen state. Many fish products come in pre-marinated, single fillet servings - very quick & easy to make. Check out Gorton’s, Van de Kamp’s and Mrs. Paul’s brands – look for the un-breaded choices.
- **Leftovers** – Well-wrapped food items can be stored in the freezer for weeks or months – soups, stews and casseroles freeze especially well. Freeze your leftovers in small containers that can go from the freezer to the microwave. Always thaw in the refrigerator or in the microwave, NOT on the kitchen counter.

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