

---

# Tips for Meal Planning Success

---

Meal planning is an important part of living a healthy lifestyle. It is also something that many of us tend to feel overwhelmed by or overlook when we are trying to improve our health. Taking just a few minutes each week to plan meals and snacks can help reduce stress, save money, and promote more variety in your diet. Having a plan will help you make better choices that are in line with your healthy eating goals. Here are some tips to get you started.

## Write it Down

- Choose a day each week to plan the menu. On a piece of paper or electronically, write the name of each food group (starches, proteins, vegetables, dairy, fruits, and fats) and list your favorites for each.
- Keep this list handy and add to it as more favorites come to mind.
- This list will help you remember what foods you like and provide ideas each week for what to make.

## Plan Six Days of Dinner

- Include a protein, a starch, and a vegetable at a minimum.
- Include dairy and fruit as snacks if they do not fit with dinner.
- Save favorite recipes to help make the process easier.
- Leave a night free for eating out.
- Plan easy meals on busy nights.

## Make a Grocery List

- List the ingredients that you will need to make your meals for the week. Also consider desired condiments, herbs, and spices.
- Aim for a mix of fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables.
- Buy foods for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks too.
- Keep a note pad or piece of paper on the counter or fridge and write down items you need as they run out.

## Monitor Your Success

- Make notes on recipes if you add or remove any ingredients or if you enjoyed that food.
- Monitor food waste and adjust what you buy.
- Track your monthly spending and note how much you saved by planning.

---

## Take it a Step Further

- Buy fruits and vegetables at a farmer's market.
  - [VA Handout](#) – Farmers Market Shopping Tips.
- Make at least one vegetarian dinner per week.
- Prepare dinner portions large enough so you can have leftovers for lunch.
- Assign a theme to certain days like meatless Monday, taco Tuesday, whole grain Wednesdays, Stir-Fry Fridays, etc.
- Look through the pantry, freezer, and fridge to see what needs to be used up and include these items in next week's meal plan.
- Try one new recipe each week.
- Start a monthly calendar or spreadsheet with meal ideas, favorite recipes, and grocery lists.
- Watch for sales and coupons and stock up on frequently used dry goods (i.e., pasta, rice, whole grains, beans, spices, cereals, canned sauces).

## Storage

- Label prepared food items with the date they were made to track when to use them and reduce food waste.
- Store perishable items (greens, herbs, fruits) where they are easily visible, so you remember to use them.
- Blanch vegetables for a few minutes before freezing. If the texture becomes undesirable after thawing, consider using them in soups, stews, or pasta dishes.
- Consider what to do with leftovers, such as serve them again that week or freeze them for an easy meal another week. Remember most refrigerated foods should be used or frozen within 3-4 days of being prepared.