
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 and save money. Having a plan will help you make better choices that are in line with your healthy eating goals. Here are a few tips to get you started.

1. Write it Down

- On a piece of paper, write the name of each food group (starches, proteins, vegetables, dairy, fruits and fats) and list your favorites from each area
- 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 give you ideas each week for what to make

2. 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

3. Make a Grocery List

- List the ingredients that you will need to make your meals for the week
- 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

4. 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 ahead

5. Take it a Step Further

- Buy fruits and vegetables at a farmer's market
- Make at least one dinner per week vegetarian
- Prepare dinner portions large enough so you can have leftovers for lunch
- Assign a theme to certain days like meatless Monday, taco Tuesday and Italian Wednesday
- 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