**Meal Planner:**

*Track and Plan Your Meals Weekly*

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**3 Strategies for Successful Meal Planning**

Let’s face the facts – Life can be crazy and I’m sure we’re all feeling the stress of the last few years on us. Hopefully by meal planning and prepping ahead of time, we can relieve a little bit of that stress. Below are three steps that will hopefully help you to plan and prep nutritious (and delicious!) meals that fit your diet and lifestyle!

#### **Step 1: Make a Menu**

First, think about your approach to meal planning — do you:

* Want to make a weekly or a monthly plan?
* Prefer to prepare meals ahead of time, just before the meal or a combination of both?
* Want to pick a day to cook meals for the week or a month that you can store in the freezer?
* Need to consider any special nutrition needs for yourself or your family?

**Next, either on a sheet of paper, in your phone or on or the computer, create your menu:**

* **Take a minute to read about how to put together a healthy meal** and make sure you are getting the right amount of each food group:

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*“3 Strategies for Successful Meal Planning” from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Barbara Gordon, RDN, LD. 2021*

* **Flip through cookbooks or online sites and find**[**recipes**](https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/recipes)**that look good.** Evaluate the level of cooking skill required to make the recipe. Do you have those skills? If not, are you up for the challenge?
* **Check in with your family about their schedules and meal preferences.** Weigh those factors as you put together your menu. **Check in with your family about their schedules and meal preferences.** Weigh those factors as you put together your menu.
* **Think about the weather.** Hearty [**soups**](https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/recipes/slow-cooker-minestrone-soup-recipe) and [**stews**](https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/recipes/quick-potato-vegetable-and-bean-stew-recipe) are ideal for a cold winter’s night. A [**salad**](https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/recipes/no-shell-vegetarian-taco-salad-recipe) with lean protein can make a perfect entrée on a hot summer day. If you are [**packing lunches**](https://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety/multimedia/videos/safely-pack-your-lunch), make sure any perishables can be stored in a refrigerator or in an insulated bag with an ice pack.
* **Find out what ingredients you already have on hand.** It is best to continually rotate foodstuffs rather than store them for long periods of time. So, try to use up the items that you have on hand. You’ll also save money!
* **Check out the sales at your local supermarkets.** Sometimes a discounted price can allow you to treat yourself and your family to a special meal. Remember: produce that is in season tends to be less expensive.
* **Aim for variety in meals; but, don’t feel like every day must be different.** It’s OK to have oatmeal or low-fat yogurt with berries several times a week for breakfast. The same goes for lunch; pick a few options and rotate them across a week. Jot down breakfast, lunch and dinner options. And, don’t forget about snacks.
* **Think about how to handle leftovers.** Might you serve them again that week or freeze them for another week? Remember to consider food safety, as refrigerated [**leftovers**](https://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety/four-steps/cook/tips-for-reheating-leftovers) should be used up within three to four days or frozen for later use.
* **Run the menu by others in your household.** Does it look good to them? Make any adjustments needed.
* **During the week, keep notes about how well the menu worked.** These notes can remind you of ways to improve your recipes and menu.

#### **Step 2: Stock Your Pantry and Freezer with the Five Food Groups**

To help get started with meal planning, take time to stock up on the basics. This includes healthy foods that you like to eat and prepare. The lists below provide pantry and freezer items to stock up on from the five food groups. Circle the items you want to stock in your pantry and freezer. Plus, add other items based on your personal health needs and food preferences.

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Five Food Groups Pantry List

**Vegetables**: Keep a variety of canned tomatoes in stock (diced, crushed, whole, stewed). Use them in soups, stews, sauces, casseroles and more! Also, pick up a bottle of your favorite spaghetti sauce. Dried mushrooms are another great pantry item because they can add depth of flavor to your meals.

**Fruits**: Raisins, dried cranberries, dried apricots and other dried fruits are loaded with dietary fiber. They add a punch of flavor to your morning breakfast, midday salad and dinner grains.

**Milk and Dairy Products**: Dried milk is a great back-up item to have on stock. You can use it in your coffee or tea. Boxed milk is also available in single-serving packages and is a great item for lunch boxes. Evaporated milk, available in cans in the baking aisle, can be substituted for liquid milk in most recipes.

**Protein Foods:** Stock up on canned or dried lentils, black, pinto, cannellini, garbanzo and kidney beans. These legumes are a great source of protein. Toss cooked beans in salads, soups, stews and other dishes. Canned tuna, anchovies and sardines are a pantry must — they are a quick way to add protein, healthy fats and flavor to meals.

**Grains**: Keep a stash of oatmeal, buckwheat and other whole-grain cereals in the pantry. For an extra boost, add nuts and fresh berries to these hot cereals. Barley, farro, quinoa and other grains provide staples for healthy meals. Also, keep a variety of rice on hand — long grain, short grain, basmati and brown rice. Spaghetti, ziti, penne and other pastas are great for an easy, quick and filling family meal. Give yourself an extra nutrition boost by buying whole-grain pasta or trying pasta made from legumes.

*Also, stock up on:*

* **Condiments**: Ketchup, mustard and relish can be stored in the pantry until they are opened. Once you open them, keep them in the fridge.
* **Oil and vinegar**: Extra-virgin olive oil is a versatile, heart-healthy option. Other oils, such as peanut, walnut and sesame add a burst of flavor to meals. Pick up different types of vinegar, such as cider, white and balsamic. Each imparts a unique flavor to your recipes.
* **Stock**: Vegetable, chicken and beef stock are the basics of many recipes. Opt for those are low-sodium or contain no added salt.
* **Herbs and spices**: Pick up small containers of ground herbs and spices. That way they are as fresh as possible when you use them.
* **Flax and other seeds:**Flax and chia seeds deliver of protein, fiber and omega-3 fatty acids. Add them to cereal, salads, sauces and home-baked goods. If you buy whole flaxseed, make sure you grind it up before eating so your body can absorb the nutrients.

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Five Food Groups - ***Freezer List***

To help make sure you don’t store food beyond freshness, put dates on the packages before storing in the freezer. And try to use the oldest first.

* **Vegetables**:Pick up some of your favorite frozen veggies. These are a great source of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients because the flash-freezing process locks in the nutrition. Look for packages without sodium. And, while you are in the produce aisle, grab some fresh herbs. When you get home, fill ice cube trays with chopped herbs, top off the herbs with boiling water, and carefully place in the freezer. Add these herbs cubes for a punch of freshness to your meals.
* **Fruits**: Stash frozen berries and other fruits in the freezer. They are a great way to add nutrition to a morning smoothie.
* **Milk and Dairy Products**:Freeze Parmesan and other pre-shredded cheeses — toss them into soups, stews and pasta dishes. Low fat, frozen yogurt can be a quick dessert for a special occasion.
* **Protein Foods:** Stock up on salmon and other fatty fishes to ensure you have ready access to healthy fats. Frozen lean meats and poultry also store well in the freezer. One tip: make sure you move it to the refrigerator one day before cooking to give adequate time for defrosting. Keep a variety of nuts in the freezer. This helps prevent them from spoiling. Add them to cold cereal, salads, hot grains and other dishes.
* **Grains**: Whole-grain corn tortillas freeze well and can be used for quick breakfasts, lunches or dinners. Can’t eat that loaf of bread fast enough while it is fresh? Make it a habit to freeze part of the loaf and defrost slices as you need them.

#### **Step 3: Keep a Running Grocery List**

In a convenient place keep a pad and pen and, as you use up grocery items, write them down on the list. This way you don’t have to worry about forgetting anything when you hit the supermarket. Or use an app for that.

There are many grocery shopping apps available for both iOS and Android platforms. Some apps even include information on where to get the best deals on food prices. For example, after you enter your list, the app might suggest which local supermarket has the best prices for those items. Others allow you to sort your list into categories for ease of shopping. And, meal planning options also are special features of some apps.

On your list — be it paper or app-based — compile the needed ingredients for the meals you plan to make for the week. Also, think about how often you are able and want to shop. Plus, think about your plan for meals and check to see what ingredients you already have and what items you need. Remember to check the cabinets, pantry, fridge and freezer. Ideally, you want to continually use what you have on hand so that your meals are made with fresh ingredients and this will also help reduce food waste.

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10 Tips for Planning Meals on a Budget

1. Make a menu. Decide which recipes you will make for lunch and dinner and make a list of the items that you will need from the grocery store. When you have a plan, you will be less likely to spend money on fast food or convenience meals. Take a look at these tips for easy menu planning.
2. Plan your meals around foods that are on sale. Check store flyers, newspaper inserts and coupon sites online. You may be surprised at the good buys available. Just be sure to buy and plan for foods that you will actually use so that they don’t go to waste.
3. Plan at least one meatless meal a week. Legumes (beans, lentils, dried peas), eggs, tofu, peanut butter and canned fish offer great tasting protein at a good price. Here are a few tasty meatless meal recipes: Black Bean Couscous Salad, Egg Bhurji, and Sweet Chili Tofu Stir-fry.
4. Check your pantry, refrigerator and freezer. Look at the expiry dates of the foods and ingredients you already have on hand. Which ones do you need to use up? Look for recipes that use those foods and ingredients.
5. Enjoy grains more often. Grains such as rice, pasta, barley and couscous are inexpensive and can be used in many different recipes. Try them in soups, stews and salads such as Chicken Bulgur Salad.
6. Avoid recipes that need a special ingredient. Some recipes call for a special ingredient that you may not have. How much does that ingredient cost? Does it come in a small or big package? Can you use it in other recipes before it goes bad? It may not be worth the money to buy an ingredient if you are only going to use it once. Leave the ingredient out or try the recipe with an ingredient that you already have at home. It’s fun to experiment while cooking and you may surprise yourself with the finished dish.
7. Look for seasonal recipes. Vegetables and fruit are cheaper when they’re in season.
8. Plan to use leftovers. Think about how you can use leftovers. If you’re cooking roast chicken with rice and vegetables for Sunday night’s supper, then make chicken sandwiches for Monday’s lunch. On Tuesday, use the bones to make a chicken soup and toss in any leftover vegetables and rice.
9. Make extras. Don’t let a big bunch of carrots or celery go to waste. Use it all up by making an extra big pot of soup. If ground beef is on sale, make two batches of lasagna instead of one. Serve one batch for dinner and freeze the other batch in meal-sized portions for another time.
10. Know what your family likes to eat. Encourage your family to share their favorites and help with menu planning. That way you can look for favorite ingredients and foods when they go on sale.

*“10 Tips for Planning Meals on a Budget.”* Unlockfood.ca, 24 Nov. 2020. https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Budget/10-Tips-for-Planning-Meals-on-a-Budget.aspx.

# The six principles of planning a meal

Most people consider quantity rather than quality when planning their meals. To improve food quality, household meals should be planned based on six principles: These principles are *adequacy, balance, calorie control, nutrient density, moderation and variety.*

**Adequacy:**

This is about planning meals that should provide enough energy and all the other nutrients required to meet the needs of healthy people.

For example, a person whose diet fails to provide enough iron-rich foods may develop the symptoms of iron deficiency anemia. The same is true for all other nutrients. To achieve adequate meals in the households, choose a variety of foods from each major food group to ensure intake of adequate amounts of calories, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

The major food groups include carbohydrates, proteins (meats and meat alternatives), milk/dairy products, fruits & vegetables and fats & sugars.

**Balance:**

It entails providing foods of several types in similar proportions. For example, use some meat or meat alternatives for iron, some milk or milk products for calcium and save some space for other foods. This ensures one does not over-consume some foods at the expense of the others.

**Calorie control**:

This involves management of food energy intake (calories). The key to controlling calories is to select foods of high nutrient density and less of calorie-dense foods like fried foods or sugary snacks & drinks.

Low calorie, nutrient-dense foods include fruits, vegetables and any food that incorporates a lot of water during cooking (instead of cooking in fat/grease) like steamed and/or boiled foods.

**Nutrient density:**

This is a measure of the nutrients a food provides relative to the energy it offers. To understand this principle, it is important to note that part of the secret to eating well without overeating is to select foods that deliver the most nutrients for the least energy. Nutrient density is assessed by comparing the vitamin and mineral content of a food with the amount of calories it provides.

The more nutrients and fewer calories, the higher the nutrient density. Nutrient-dense foods include *fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.*

*Spinach, cabbage, collard greens, berries and cherries, whole grain cereals, beans, chickpeas, lentils, beans, peanuts, chia seeds, macadamia nuts, almonds, flaxseed, etc.* will make your meals more nutrient-dense. Less nutrient-dense foods include *candies, carbonated, alcoholic and sport drinks, baked products like cakes, pastries and doughnuts, ready prepared food products as well as processed meats*. These foods should be consumed in moderation.

Retrieved from*: https://nation.africa/kenya/business/seeds-of-gold/the-six-principles-of-planning-a-meal-281192*

**Moderation:**

It mostly applies to (unhealthy) fats and sugars. Foods rich in fat and sugar have relatively few nutrients. In addition, they promote weight gain when eaten in excess.A person practicing moderation should only eat foods rich in fat and sugars occasionally. Generally, the principle of moderation involves providing enough but not too much of a dietary item. The goal should be to moderate rather than eliminate intake of some foods.

**Variety:**

It is necessary to note that a diet may have everything described under the other five principles of meal planning but still lack variety, if a person eats the same foods day in, day out.

Variety is important because different foods in the same group still contain different nutrients.

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Weekly Meal Plan

**Monday**

**Spices, Herbs & Seasonings:**

**Sunday**

**Saturday**

**Friday**

**Thursday**

**Wednesday**

**Tuesday**

**Shopping List**

**Produce**

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**•**

**Meat**

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**•**

**Grains**

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**Dairy/Eggs**

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