

Cook Smarter, Not Harder: The Busy Person's Guide to Meal Prepping & Planning

- ***Breaking through our barriers***
- ***Real-life tips for success***
- ***Meal-planning activity***
- ***Recipes on a budget***

Wing it less and enjoy dinnertime more!

INVEST EAP

Agenda for our time

1. Gathering and Setting the Table
2. Acknowledging Your "**Dinner Dilemma**" and **Finding Your Why**
3. Meal Planning: **The Essential Blueprint**
4. Creating **Easy Access** to the Best Choices for **You**
5. **Once You're In the Kitchen**…
6. Next Steps and Closing









- Let’s replace the word “should” with “**can**” or “**want to**”
- Let’s be **realistic** with ourselves and each other
- Keep what works and leave what doesn’t
- **Judgment-free place** to ask questions or share stories



Setting the Table:

Group agreement

What is your #1 barrier to meal planning or meal prep?

- **Time:** *I think it takes too long*
- **Exhaustion:** *The last thing I want to do is cook a complicated meal*
- **Money:** *It's too expensive to eat the way I think I "should"*
- **Creativity/need to break out of a rut:** *I need something enticing and quick that we will actually enjoy*



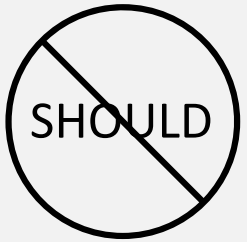
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Identifying our barrier is the first step to solving it

- These aren’t personal failures. **Your habits are your brain trying to help.**

- We are wired to return to routines that have eased stress or suffering in the past.

- Our only goal today….
  Create conditions for easy access to a new choice





Well, that makes sense!

Willpower is not enough.
Let’s work with your personality instead of against it

If it feels like too much of a chore, what are your odds of following through? Pretty slim!



Give "future you" a gift



FINDING YOUR "WANT TO"

Pace yourself and make your best option the easiest option

Meal Planning!

Here's where we're headed – let's decide a few essential pieces to our blueprint first



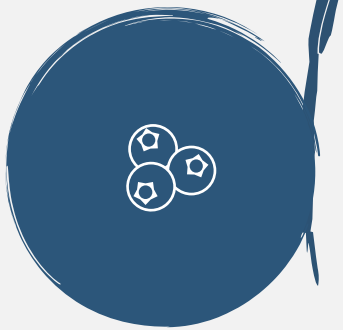
Decide on your meal prep style

Your method can be just for this week. Will you cook in bulk and portion? Freeze whole meals? Use the crockpot 2x?



Choose Your Meal Plan Day

Start by designating a regular day where you will **conduct a kitchen inventory** and **make a meal plan** for the week.



Set bite-sized goals

It's okay to start with just two nights a week or some base recipes. *(Bonus: make some **foundational items** that work for several easy dishes!)*

Meal Planner for the week of 6/2/2025

Sunday	Grocery List
Main:	·
Side:	·
	·
Monday	·
Main:	·
Side:	·
	·
Tuesday	·
Main:	·
Side:	·
	·
Wednesday	·
Main:	·
Side:	·
	·
Thursday	·
Main:	Ingredients I have
Side:	

What's your prep personality?

★ *Write down your style!*



Make-ahead meals

<u>Complete</u> meals cooked in advance which can be refrigerated and reheated at mealtimes (casserole, tub of taco meat with chopped sides)



Bulk cooking

Making **large batches** of a specific recipe, then **splitting into individual portions** to be frozen and eaten over a longer period of time



Individual fresh meals

Preparing **fresh meals and portioning them** into containers to be eaten over the **next couple of days** (fish, salad)



Ready-to-cook ingredients

Prepping the ingredients required for **specific meals** ahead of time (chopping veggies, marinating meat)

- **Evaluate your week before** planning meals accordingly

- **Mark the days** that meals may be difficult with a small “X” in the corner *(working late, kids have sports)*

- **TIP:** Put breakfast and lunches on autopilot for a while. Have the same 2 or 3 options for breakfast and lunch *($2 healthy breakfasts)*.

- Investing in **future you**



Remember:

Create conditions for easy access to your new choices!

A 'Lazy Genius' Trick or Two☺

Choose one tip to help you in the coming week; some will save you money or time



Use what you have

We love this "meals by ingredient" site!



Stock up on staples

Healthy pantry and fridge staples



Choose recipes for doubling

If bulk cooking is your goal, choose recipes that freeze well.



Make it fun!

Save your favorite show for cooking time or put on fun music

dinner planner

Meatless Monday
or
Soup and Salad Night

Taco Tuesday
or
Burger and Skewer Night

One-Dish Wednesday
or
Breakfast for Dinner

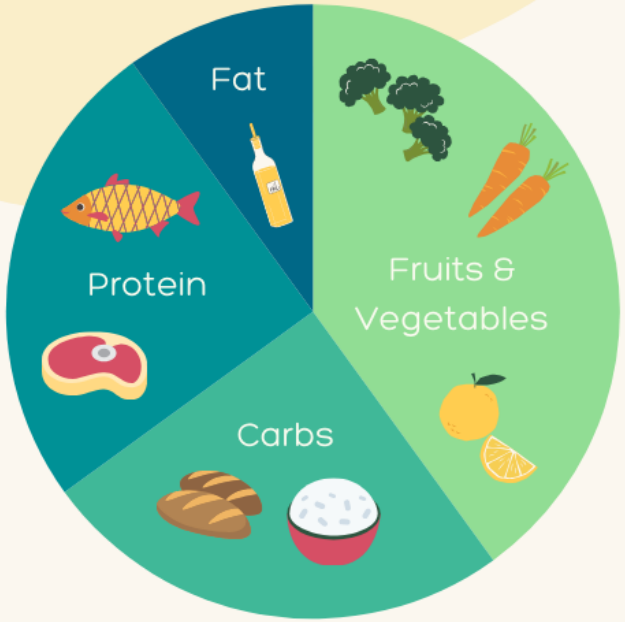
Stir-Fry Thursday
or
Leftovers/Sandwiches

Takeout Friday
or
Grilling for the Weekend

Family Cooking Saturday
or
Sheet Pan Saturday

Slow Cooker Sunday
or
Fend For Yourself Night

BUILDING A PLATE



Fruits & Vegetables
Broccoli, carrots, pre-made salad mix, apples, berries

Carbohydrate
Rice, wheat, bread, potatoes (try for whole grain)

Protein
Fish, beef or steak, beans, chicken, lentils, tofu

Fats
Olive oil, avocado, coconut oil, nut oils (almond, cashew)

[Five Nights of Meals – With Shopping Lists!]


I CAN DO
ANYTHING
NOT
EVERYTHING.

Once You're In The Kitchen

A well-thought-out workflow will save you a lot of time and effort



Mise en place

A French culinary term that translates to *"everything in its place."*
Prepare and organize **all** ingredients, tools, and equipment you will need for the recipe(s).



Be efficient!

Check the ingredients for **all weekly recipes** before starting.
Chop all the veggies you'll need; make and freeze extra sauces; cook and shred all the chicken. *(Essential for bulk cooking!)*



Cook smarter

Start with the recipe **requiring the longest cook time** (often stovetop or oven main meal); start on cold or side dishes once the main meals are underway.



Time-saving tools

Crockpots/Instapots and glass containers: buy at thrift stores!
Portion out meals into individual servings (labeled) or use this guide to freezing and reheating meals.

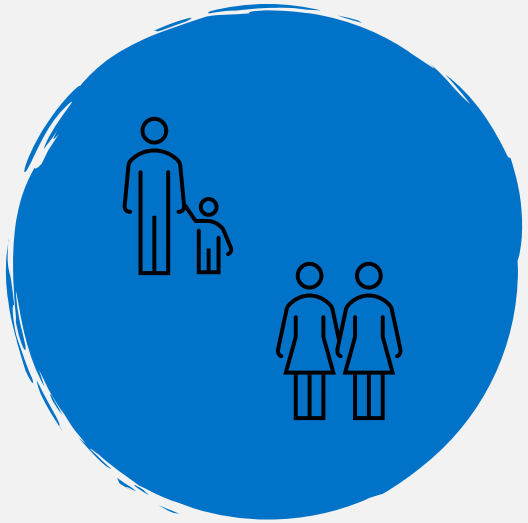
Some Final Tips and Tricks

Small changes count!



Stay flexible!

Once you've found your groove in meal planning, **leave room for spontaneity** (or pre-plan a couple flexible meal slots using those staples).



They live here, too!

Delegate meal prep tasks to family members; consider a "batch cooking" day with friends.



Keep eating the foods you love

Incorporate meals that **make you feel excited**! If your goal is a healthier menu, check out these food swap ideas.

Your Next Smart Step

Items you'll receive from us



- **These slides** with all the active links
- Handouts with **sample shopping lists**
- Fresh **Meal Planner** sheet
- The **EAP Staff Recipe Book**!
- Template for your own staff or family recipe book *(PowerPoint)*

Now... let's go cook less and live more!

THANK YOU

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