

Meal Planning

There is no denying that we live in a very busy world, and being busy is often synonymous with spending less time in the kitchen. As a society, moving away from the kitchen has created a disconnect between ingredients, preparation, eating, portion size, and taste - a disconnect that has helped increase cholesterol, waistlines, and disease risk. Preparing meals doesn't have to take hours, it doesn't have to dirty every pot in the kitchen, and it doesn't require a laundry list of ingredients. By arming yourself with some planning techniques and basic cooking skills you can revitalize (or spark) a love for your kitchen, improve your culinary motivation and make eating a tastier, more enjoyable experience.

While there are many approaches to meal planning, I recognize two primary methodologies:

METHOD #1: Meals

Plan your meals for the week in advance
go to the store with a list
shop for the ingredients
follow the plan

METHOD #2: Ingredients

Shop for a pantry and refrigerator full of "staples"
prepare meals based on what you have.

Regardless of the method you prefer, and it may be that you start with a weekly plan and transition to a more free-flowing creative combination of kitchen ingredients as you gain experience and confidence, it helps to understand some basics.

✓**Keep it Simple:** due to weekday time constraints, it makes sense to keep weekday meal preparation quick and easy. Great, healthy food doesn't require anything fancy or elaborate

✓**Read:** If you are following a recipe, read the instructions from start to finish. Sometimes steps that you need to start at the beginning are hidden at the end of a recipe

✓**Organize:** Have a timeline written out or locked in your memory. This will help your cooking experience run smoothly. Once you read the recipe, get the food, pots and pans, as well as utensils that you will need out and ready to go

✓**Tools:** Cooking doesn't require a unique tool for every task. Spend a bit more money on a few quality tools (knives, pots & pans) and skip the gadgets.

✓**Clean Up:** Wash your hands, pull your hair back, and start with a clean workspace. Cleaning up as you go will keep your area organized and give you less to do after the meal.

✓**Time Management:** Your ultimate goal is to have everything ready at the same time. When you plan what you are going to make, think about the meal as a whole and determine what you need to do first.

- What foods take the longest to cook?

- What foods need to be served hot and what foods should be served chilled?

- What foods require additional prep work? wash, chop, steam, defrost, chill

✓**Safety:** Use knives you feel comfortable holding, keep them sharp

✓**Balance:** You want each meal to be balanced...

Mostly Veggies...



Create space for Carbs...

Little bit of protein...

Fat for flavor...

Lots of color!

If you like to follow the *Meal Method* and plan your weekly meals, make a shopping list based on what you intend to prepare. Consider preparing dishes that can do “double duty,” so that you have lunches or portions of dinner prepared for later in the week. Here is an example:

| Day | Meal | Extras? Make extra or prepare more... | Shopping List Some items may be in your kitchen or pantry already | |
|-----------|---|---|--|---|
| | | | Pantry | Fridge / Freezer |
| Monday | <i>Peanut Crusted Salmon Brown rice & green beans</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Make double the brown rice & store in an airtight container for use later in the week | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •brown rice •peanuts •breadcrumbs •orange •salt, pepper •olive oil •garlic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •green beans •salmon |
| Tuesday |  <i>Tofu Mushroom Burgers Green salad</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use leftover brown rice to make the burgers •Bring extra for lunch •Save leftover tofu for tacos later in the week •Clean extra mushrooms for tomorrow's dinner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •oats •canola oil •balsamic vinegar •tomatoes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •tofu •mushrooms •cheddar •eggs (12) •lettuce •cucumber •fresh mozzarella |
| Wednesday | <i>Broccoli and Mushroom Frittata with Feta and Pine nuts Crusty whole wheat bread</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •leftovers for lunch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •pine nuts •dried thyme & oregano •zucchini •bread | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •broccoli •feta cheese •leek |
| Thursday | <i>Ginger-Lime Chicken Skewers Quinoa & Bell Pepper Salad</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mix leftover chicken with quinoa and bell pepper salad for a great lunch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •quinoa •Peppers •onion •Soy sauce •Lime •ginger root •crushed red pepper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chicken |
| Friday |  <i>Tofu Tacos Black Bean Salad</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use tofu leftover from the burgers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •whole grain tortillas •black beans •avocado | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •carrots |
| Saturday | <i>Greek Burgers Squash & Beet Fries</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cut extra squash for tomorrow's pasta | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •tomato paste •whole grain rolls •Winter Squash •Beets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lean ground beef/ buffalo •Fresh rosemary |
| Sunday | <i>Whole Wheat Pasta w/ Chicken Sausage, Kale, Squash, Zucchini & Pine nuts</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leftovers for Monday's lunch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tomato Sauce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chicken Sausage •Kale |

To follow the *Ingredient Method*, start with perishable ingredients that you need to use, then think about creating a balanced meal. Here are some examples:

| <i>Ingredients</i> | <i>Meal Options</i> |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Broccoli •Kale | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pasta: whole wheat noodles with black beans, kale, broccoli, feta cheese, lemon juice, salt, pepper, olive oil and pine nuts 2. Stir-Fry: brown rice, tempeh or eggs,, onion, carrot, broccoli, kale, peanuts (soy sauce, garlic & sesame oil) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Butternut Squash •Tomatoes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pureed Squash soup: (onions, squash, tomatoes, garlic, chicken broth 2. Burgers with squash fries & tomato cucumber salad |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chicken Breasts •Spinach | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Baked or grilled chicken with fresh/dried herbs & spinach salad 2. Pasta: Cut chicken into pieces and toss with pasta, spinach and tomato sauce or olive oil and extra veggies |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Green beans •Feta Cheese •Eggs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frittata with green beans, peppers, onions, tomatoes (or any available veggies), topped with Feta cheese 2. Sauteed green beans topped with feta cheese; scrambled eggs wrapped in a tortilla with veggies |



PANTRY STAPLES:

- beans (canned or fresh)
- grains (quinoa, barley, oats)
- pasta (whole wheat, regular & different sizes & shapes)
- nuts (almonds, pine nuts, walnuts, peanuts)
- rice (brown)
- bread
- oils (olive, canola, peanut)
- chicken broth

PERISHABLE STAPLES:

- veggies (carrots, broccoli, lettuce, leafy greens & other seasonal varieties)
- starchy veggies (squash, sweet potatoes, yams)
- cheese (parmesan, feta, sharp cheddar, fresh mozzarella)
- yogurt (32oz plain - consider Greek yogurts)
- tofu
- tempeh
- milk (skim, soy)

FROZEN STAPLES:

- meat, chicken
- fish
- frozen veggies (spinach, peas, edemame)

However you decide to plan and prepare your meals, getting into the kitchen will be a rewarding experience. Remember that some of the best recipes are created from mistakes, so be creative!

