

# Meal Planning Made Easy

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Have you ever heard the phrase, “A little bit of planning goes a long way?” Planning is an important step for almost everything we do! It is helpful when we are going on a trip, starting a project or finishing an assignment. **Meal planning also can support a healthy diet and help us manage our money too!**

## How to Create a MEAL PLAN

**01 Take Time to Plan**

**02 Reduce Food Waste**

**03 Plan to Save**

**04 Get Started on a Meal Plan**

### How to Create Your Meal Plan

#### Take the Time to Plan

Set aside time to work on your meal plan. Be consistent. Choose a specific time during the week or weekend that works best for you and use that same time each week to make your meal plan.

Include your family in the meal planning process. Ask children and other family members to pick their favorite dish or a new recipe they would like to try in the upcoming week.

Decide how many days you will include in your meal plan. Do you want to plan meals for the next week, two weeks or just a few days?

Think about your upcoming activities and events. What will you be doing on the days included in your meal plan? If there are days that are very busy, you may want to plan meals that are easy to prepare.

Ask yourself if there are any days when you will be eating at a restaurant, with family or friends or at school or work. Include those events in your meal plan so that you don't buy more food than you have time to prepare and eat.

## Reduce Food Waste

Check your refrigerator, pantry and freezer to see what foods you have at home. Look for foods that need to be used before they spoil. Include those foods in your meal plan so that they aren't wasted! If you have fresh foods that need to be used quickly, plan meals that use those foods.

Remember to use leftovers! Include leftovers or "planned overs" in your meal plan. Planned overs are different ways to use leftover foods. For example, if you had grilled chicken on Monday, you might have pasta with chicken and vegetables later in the week.

Plan to use your leftovers within three to four days and refrigerate or freeze fresh foods within two hours to keep food safe to eat

## Plan to Save

Check for coupons, sales and specials at your local grocery stores. Include foods that are on sale in your meal plan. For example, if zucchini is on sale at your local store, consider adding it as a side dish or part of a mixed dish.



## Get Started on the Meal Plan

Now that you know the foods you need to use quickly and the activities that affect your meal plan, start planning. Make your meal plan as detailed as you want. You might want to start by planning the dinners you will prepare during the upcoming week or include breakfast, lunch and snacks as well.

Make mealtime exciting with themed meal nights. For example, you might have breakfast for dinner, Asian cuisine, Latin American cuisine or pizza and salad on certain nights of the week.

Search the MyPlate Kitchen website to find healthy recipes that you and your family would like to try. You can even make your own personalized cookbook with these recipes.

Browse the UT Healthy Families, Healthy Communities website with your family to find delicious, nutritious, and affordable recipes and to learn cooking tips.

As you plan your meals, use MyPlate to choose balanced meals with a variety of nutritious foods. Use the following steps to help you plan meals based on MyPlate:

- Fill half of your plate with a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Make one-quarter of your plate grains. Aim for whole grains that are rich in nutrients.
- Make one-quarter of your plate a lean protein food. Include various protein foods like fish, seafood, beans, peas, nuts, seeds and eggs.
- Include a low-fat or fat-free dairy product like milk or yogurt.

## Online Resources

MyPlate Kitchen: [myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen](https://myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen)

UT Healthy Families, Healthy Communities: [healthyfamilies.tennessee.edu/](https://healthyfamilies.tennessee.edu/)

# Meal Planning Worksheet

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Theme	Soup for Dinner on Sunday	Pasta for Dinner	Breakfast for Dinner			Make your own pizza night	
Activities				Late Afternoon appointment		Making Dinner with friends	Birthday Dinner
Breakfast	Scrambled eggs and toast	Oatmeal with nuts and dried fruit	Waffle with peanut butter and fruit	Whole Wheat tortilla with banana and peanut butter		Yogurt parfait with nuts and berries	Cheese toast with fruit and yogurt
Lunch	Lunch with family		Lunch at work				
Dinner	Vegetable soup and baked potato	Spaghetti with salad	Choose your own omelets	Leftover spaghetti with steamed broccoli	Grilled shrimp and vegetables over rice	Choose your own english muffin pizzas	Family Dinner at a restaurant
Snacks							

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