



Low Stress Meal Planning

A Healthy Eating Pattern does not mean dieting, but rather contributing to a healthy lifestyle with the foods one eats. This includes great-tasting foods you love and developing a sensible, balanced eating plan; and committing to making behavior changes. It is important to remember there is no such thing as a one-size fits all approach to weight management.

Meal Planning can help you reduce stress, as well as save time and money. Meals prepared at home are often healthier and taste better. Planning meals for several days in advance can also benefit your budget by reducing trips to the store, help stick to a shopping list and buy just what you need. Your menus should fit your food likes and dislikes, match your eating pattern and provide for your nutritional needs. Be sure to include your favorite recipes and match your time, energy and interest in cooking.

My/Our Favorite Meals: Using pencil and paper or the Notes or menu planning app in your smart phone, make a list of the **main dishes** your make most often. Add a side dish, like bean soup and cornbread, or spaghetti and tossed salad. I like to make my menus on index cards and keep them in the back of my recipe box. Then, it's easy to sort through them and pull out a meal plan I haven't used in a while.

Plan for a Week or a Month: If you shop for groceries weekly, start with planning a week of your main meals. You can use a weekly or monthly planning tool, or makes notes on your calendar as you consider the daily activities of your household and/or work schedule. Couple examples:

<https://app.box.com/s/cka7wbnp16xyfraps71czg8ovi56kvjm> https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/audiences/grocery_gameplan_interactive.pdf

- **Vary Protein Foods** throughout the week/month. Meat is a great source of protein and nutrients, but is more expensive than other foods. Watch for sales and try some fish, pork or other meats for a variety of tastes and nutrition, Also consider dried beans, peas, lentils, eggs and nuts as protein sources.
- **Make Grocery List:** Check your refrigerator, freezer and cupboards for foods you need to use; then jot down items you need from the store.
- **Find Balance:** As you prepare/serve each meal, do your best to have foods from at least 3 food groups; and get all 5 food groups every day to get the nutrients your body needs. Have fresh vegetables/salad and fruit on hand to complete your meals.
- **Create Visual Appeal:** We eat with all our senses. Choose foods of contrasting colors, textures, flavors, sizes, shapes and temperatures to make meals more enjoyable! Half the plate should be vegetables and fruits – so choose some colorful ones!
- **Planned Overs:** Be efficient with your time and resources by cooking once and eating twice. I like to cook a couple main dishes and do a little baking on the weekend to make it easier to prepare quick meals during the week. Cook a roast or whole chicken and plan 2 or 3 meals. Properly store the portions for the meals in the refrigerator or freezer until ready to use. To keep your food budget in check, don't let half a roast be used as snack food.

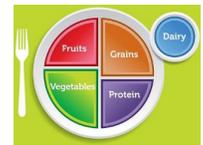


- **Prep Food:** To save time during the week, take a few minutes on the weekend to wash and cut veggies for salad or veggies sticks. When dicing an onion, cut up the whole onion and store extra in a freezer bag/container in the freezer. Bake muffins or make a batch of breakfast burritos for the week.
- **Leftovers** are great to take for lunch. Make a casserole or soup with the leftovers. Or, plan a “Clean the Frig” night and pull out all the containers with a serving of this or that. Let each person choose a dish to warm up. Then add a fresh salad, veggies and dip, or fresh fruit to round out the meal.

Meals Away from Home: Cooking and preparing meals at home allows more control over what and how much someone eats. Despite this, Americans eat about 24% of their meals away from home for social celebrations, for convenience, or due to a lack of cooking skills. Food prepared away from home is meant to look, smell, and taste great - meaning nutrition isn’t necessarily the priority. Additionally, dishes are commonly served in large portion sizes. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to understand how to eat healthy away from the home.

Here are some tips for eating healthy away from home.

- Have a plan- If you know ahead of time you are going out, have lighter meals during the day.
- Visualize MyPlate and be deliberate when ordering to create a balanced meal. Fill your plate with vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/budget/budget-weekly-meals>
- Watch for wording and ask questions. Look for words such as “grilled”, “broiled”, “steamed”, or “baked,” meaning the food is cooked with less fat. Ask for sauces and dressings on the side or ask to make substitutions like salad or fruit instead of fried.
- Ask for a to-go box. Eat half in the restaurant and take the rest home to enjoy the next day.
- To control portion sizes, build a meal from the appetizer or side dish section of the menu or share a main dish with a friend.
- Consider your drink choice. Choose water or beverages without added sugar.



Be Flexible: Life happens and we need to improvise. You can still have **Quick and Easy Meals:** Have food on hand for **30 Minutes Meals**, like Tacos/Taco Salad, Cheeseburger Macaroni Skillet, Tuna Casserole, or pancakes and eggs. Make meals easier by reducing the clean-up time. When you start your meal prep, run a sink of soapy dishwater to help you keep your dishes done as you go. You can enjoy your meal and have a 5 minute clean up following the meal.

Good health and weight management include a life-long commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Daily choices add up to a lifestyle. **Self-regulation** is choosing to eat a variety of foods, in appropriate portions because you are physically hungry. Incorporating at least **30 minutes of physical activity each day** can help individuals achieve or maintain good health.

Additional Resources:

Food Shopping and Meal Planning: <https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/shopping-cooking-and-meal-planning/food-shopping-and-meal-planning>

Quick and Healthy Meals: <https://foodsmartcolorado.colostate.edu/nutrition-and-health/healthy-eating/tools-for-healthy-eating/quick-and-healthy-meals/>

Tools for Healthy Eating: <https://foodsmartcolorado.colostate.edu/nutrition-and-health/healthy-eating/tools-for-healthy-eating/>

What is a Healthy Eating Pattern? <https://foodsmartcolorado.colostate.edu/nutrition-and-health/healthy-eating/tools-for-healthy-eating/1what-is-a-healthy-eating-pattern/>





AHW Lesson Activities

Live More, Stress Less

“Applying the Lesson”

Choose one of the following activities to apply what you learned about your health and your healthy goal setting. Write a short paragraph (3 to 5 sentences) to describe what you did and learned from the activity selected. Report your Applying the Lesson results by Online form, email, fax or hard copy to your county Extension Office.

Option 1: What **meal planning tips** from the lesson or other resources have you found to be the most useful in developing a healthy eating habits?

Option 2: Digital Meal/Menu Planning Tools – If you want to do your menu planning using a phone app or an online tool, search for meal planning tools and share one or more you plan to use and why.

<https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/best-meal-planning-apps/>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/best-meal-planning-apps>

<https://www.rmhp.org/blog/2015/may/top-8-meal-planning-apps-for-a-healthy-diet>

Option 3: Eating away from home – if you eat away from home often, what tips have you used to maintain a healthy eating pattern and help you lose or maintain a healthy weight?