

Meal Prepping

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Time goes by so fast these days, it seems we don't have the time to make healthy meals and snacks. Too often, we stop by the fast food joints to get a quick lunch and rush to the nearest Chinese food restaurant for dinner. Pretty soon our waistlines remind us that this is not the proper way of getting good nutritional meals on-the-go. So, how can we stop this cycle of fast eating madness, and save money and time? The answer is Meal Preparation!

Plan Your Menu

First, it is important that you plan a menu of the meals and snacks that you would like to prepare. You can plan for a week or a month, but choose whatever is best for you. Use an excel spreadsheet calendar (available online) to keep track of what you going to eat each day. Also, when planning your menu, think about the food you throw away. For less waste, buy or cook only what you need. Use the correct portion sizes for the amount of each food that you plan to eat for all meals and snacks. Lastly, be sure to check your refrigerator and pantry to see what you already have in stock to avoid unnecessary trips to the grocery store and buying extra food.

Let's Go Shopping

Once you have decided on your menu items, create a shopping list that corresponds with the grocery store aisles. Make sure you include budget-friendly and long lasting items such as fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables. Add items that can serve dual purposes, as a component of a main dish, as well as a healthy snack. Apples, oranges, sweet potatoes, leafy green vegetables, peppers, and carrots can top your salads,



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or stand on their own as a mid-day treat. Pick up pre-cut, pre-washed salad greens for a quick meal, or a tasty side dish. Keep whole grain pasta or pizza dough/crusts on hand for quick dinners during the week. Planning ahead helps you to make smarter choices and avoid impulse purchases at the store, such as processed foods, baked goods, and unhealthy snacks.

Time To Prep

Save time in the morning by prepping for your breakfast the night before. Grab-and-go meals like a waffle with peanut butter, a boiled egg and fruit or homemade oatmeal bars make the most important meal of the day a breeze. Create a breakfast with staying power using protein and carbohydrate combinations like fruit and Greek yogurt or whole-grain cereal with milk.

When prepping for dinner, prepare the items that take the longest to cook first, such as lean proteins like chicken and fish. Separate these items into portions, along with the herbs and spices needed, and place them in freezer-size Ziploc bags. Keep them in the refrigerator until you are ready to cook. Your side dishes,

such as vegetables and starches, can be prepared in larger amounts and put into smaller quart-size baggies and frozen.

Prep lunch for the entire family by packing leftovers from dinner into airtight storage containers. Be sure to read your nutrition labels, and portion out your items according to the recommended serving sizes, for a hassle-free way to manage everyone's waistline. Reheat leftovers to at least 165 degrees F. (73.89 C.) to kill any bacteria. If food is not to be refrigerated it should be held at 145 degrees F. (62.78 C.) until it is eaten. Try to divide the large amounts of food into shallow containers. The smaller the portion size, the faster food will cool in the refrigerator.

Now that you have the tools to plan your meals, start this weekend with your meal planning schedule and enjoy a stress-free week. You'll feel great knowing you've prepared

healthy meals for you and your entire family.

