Successful Meal Planning

Time passes so quickly sometimes that seasons often take us by surprise. With the fall season quickly approaching, the holidays are near. It's important for you to use good meal planning skills to stay on track during the most difficult months. Also, with kids starting back to school, meal planning and utilizing healthy snacks is important for children.

The keys to successful meal planning

- **Check the fridge, panty and freezer**
  Look through your kitchen to see what you already have on hand or what you need to throw out.

- **Plan 5 dinners, 1 to 2 leftover nights, and 1 quick fix or eat out night**
  You don’t have to have elaborate meals every night. It can be a stress reliever to take the busiest night of your week and declare that either “leftover night” or even plan for that night out. The key word is plan.

- **Use grocery store flyers and cookbooks when developing a meal plan**
  Arranging the meal plan around sale items allows you to save money. Looking at cookbooks while planning may also help you discover new meals that your family will enjoy.

- **Post the menu, shopping time and date**
  Take control of the menu. Every single meal doesn’t have to be everyone’s favorite. Cook one meal for the entire family, which they can choose to take or leave. Posting the menu in advance allows everyone to know what to expect for dinner. Also, posting a shopping time and date helps to structure your schedule and lets anyone else contribute ideas before going to the store.

Kids’ Corner

**Healthy Snacks for Kids**

- Peel a banana and dip it in yogurt. Roll in crushed cereal (less than 6 grams sugar) and freeze.
- Spread celery sticks with peanut butter or low-fat cream cheese. Top with raisins.
- Stuff a whole-grain pita pocket with ricotta cheese and Granny Smith apple slices. Add a dash of cinnamon.
- Mix together ready-to-eat cereal (less than 6 grams sugar), dried fruit and nuts in a bag for an on-the-go snack.
- Top light vanilla yogurt with crunchy granola and sprinkle with blueberries.
- Make snack kabobs with cubes of low-fat cheese and grapes on pretzel sticks.
- Toast a whole grain waffle and top with light yogurt and sliced peaches.
- Spread peanut butter on apple slices.
- Dip pretzels with mustard.
- Dip baby carrots and cherry tomatoes in low-fat ranch dressing.
- Pita chips with hummus.
- **Make a grocery store list from the meal plan**
  Sticking to a list eliminates those not-so-healthy impulse buys and saves you money in the long run. Organize your list into sections of the store to help manage time spent in the grocery store.

- **Think smart and organize smart**
  Put things away where you can quickly find them. Even organizing foods in the pantry by meal rather than type of ingredient can save time. Keep plastic storage containers and plastic bags handy to separate and store foods bought in bulk. Separate foods for lunch into bags to make packing lunch easy.

- **Prep food and cook what you can ahead of time**
  If you are making grilled chicken salad one night and fajitas the next cook all the chicken at once. Many vegetables you can precut. Some casseroles can be made on Sunday, frozen and served on Thursday. You may not have time every day to cook, but just one day. Cooking for the week is a matter of looking at your schedule and determining what works best for you.

*Consult your physician or other health care professional before starting an exercise or diet regimen to determine if it is right for your needs. This is particularly true if you have a history of high blood pressure, heart disease, or if you have experienced chest pain.*