



Mastering Meal Planning

Your Meal Plan is your flight plan for the week ahead – what you will be making for dinner (and lunch, if you get that detailed with it). It should include the main entrée, as well as the sides.

Some tips for creating your Meal Plan:

- **First, create a “Master List of Meals” that your family enjoys.** Your Master List of Meals is simply a listing of all the meals that you make. For example, a few of the meals on my Master of List of Meals include: Chicken Pesto Pasta, Taco Salad, Spaghetti & Meatballs, etc. Taking time to really think-through this first step will save you a ton of time in the long run – no more racking your brain to try to think of what you should make for the week. Simply look at your Master List of Meals each time you make your weekly meal plan. And, as you start trying new recipes, remember to add the ones your family like to your Master List.

- **Never make your meal plan without first consulting your calendar of events for the week and make sure to confer with your spouse too.** Take a look at what is happening each day and plan your meals accordingly. For example, if you have a super tight schedule on Tuesdays, plan for it to be a quick and easy-to-prepare meal night. Or plan for it to be a “left-overs night” where you can simply warm-up a meal from a previous evening. Ensuring you actually have left-overs for “left-overs night” is simple when you plan ahead for it – just make extra of a meal that reheats well, and “voila,” leftovers night!

- **Plan to make more complicated meals (or try out a new recipe) on the days you will have the most time.** For example, if you have more time during the weekend, then save a new recipe or a more complex meal for the weekend – don't try to tackle it on a day you'll be short on time!

The Nourishing Home's Healthy Weekly Meal Plan <small>(For more meal planning ideas and recipes, visit http://TheNourishingHome.com)</small>							
Meals	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caprese Pasta • Mesclun Salad w/Homemade Balsamic Vinaigrette 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grilled Chicken w/Pineapple Salsa • Black Beans • Brown Rice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey-Veggie Burgers • Caribbean Carrot Salad • Healthy Fries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strawberry-Feta Salad with Grilled Chicken • Almond Flour Biscuits w/Butter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italian Sausage, Kale & White Bean Soup • Sourdough Rolls w/Butter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grilled Fish Provençal w/Wild Rice & Asparagus • Dessert: Strawberry Shortcakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grilled Veggie Quesadillas • Black Beans & Brown Rice • Guac, Salsa & Sour Cream
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuna Salad w/Whole Grain Crackers • Fruit Salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leftover Caprese Pasta • Raw Veggies w/Ranch Dip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grilled Chicken Salad Sandwich • Strawberries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey Sliders • Leftover Carrot Salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avocado Egg Salad Sandwich • Cultured Pickles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leftover Italian Sausage Soup • Sourdough rolls w/Butter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grilled Turkey Reuben • Caudered Sauerkraut • Apple Slices
Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinnamon Streusel Muffins • Poached Eggs • Fruit Smoothie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toast-in-the-Hole • Fresh Berries w/Vanilla Yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homemade Granola w/Fresh Diced Cherries & Almond Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit & Yogurt Parfaits • Boiled Eggs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soaked Oatmeal w/Ripe Pear & Raw Honey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Toast Casserole • Nitrate-Free Bacon • Fresh Berries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluffy Almond Flour Pancakes • Scrambled Eggs • Mixed Berries
Do Ahead	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Tasks to do to "prep" for next day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save extra caprese pasta for tomorrow's lunch • Soak beans and rice for tomorrow's dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grill extra chicken to make chicken salad & for Thurs' dinner • Save extra black beans and rice for Sun's dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grill some mini-turkey burgers to make sliders for lunch tomorrow • Save leftover carrot salad for lunch tomorrow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boil extra eggs to make egg salad for tomorrow's lunch • Soak oats for tomorrow's breakfast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save extra soup for tomorrow's lunch • Prepare French toast casserole and refrigerate overnight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make meal plan for next week • Go to market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PREP DAY (prep ahead as needed for next week's meal plan)

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- **Before making your weekly meal plan, check your frig, pantry and freezer to see what you already have on hand.** then, plan meals to use those items – using what you already have on hand will really help you save MONEY!
- **Be sure to utilize the “secret” to quick and easy meal preparation – grouping meals to “Cook Once and Eat Twice or More!”** By planning ahead to group meals, you will be able to pull-off a healthy meal even on the nights you’re pressed for time! (For details, visit <http://TheNourishingHome.com>.)
- **Get inspiration and ideas from checking out other meal planners meal plans.** My weekly meal plans are available for FREE. Simply visit the meal planning section of my site at <http://TheNourishingHome.com>.

Creating a Shopping List to Save Time and Money

“The List” is your prime directive at the market, to keep you focused and save you time and money by limiting distractions and frustrations. The List ensures you quickly get exactly what you need for the week ahead. Tips for creating The List:

- **Keep a pad of paper on your kitchen counter** and jot down items as you run out of them so they can quickly and easily be added to The List.
- **Make your meal plan for the week and then go through each meal and list out all the ingredients needed to create that meal.** First, check your frig, pantry and freezer to see what you already have on hand. Any missing ingredients go on The List.
- **Never go to the market without The List!** It is a sad, sad day when you lose or forget The List. Keep a careful eye on it!

Time-Saving Tips for Shopping Day

Shopping Day is obviously the day you’re going to purchase all of the ingredients you need for the week ahead (i.e. all of the items for your meal plan). Below are a few tips for saving time and money at the market:

- **Clean out your frig and pantry before heading out to the market** – remove expired food and old leftovers you can’t use (hopefully you won’t have much as you become BFF with your meal plan), rearrange and reorganize food on the shelves for ease in locating, take one more look to see if you need something not on The List (e.g. *did your loving hubby or child put the milk back with just a few drops left in the carton?*). Reorganizing your frig and pantry ensures you know what’s on hand, where it’s located and enables you to quickly and more efficiently unload your groceries when you return home from the market.
- **Go to the market alone whenever possible to avoid distraction and temptation** – so you can limit the purchase of unnecessary items.
- **NEVER go to the market without your shopping list!** Without “The List” in hand, you will forget something and you will buy things you don’t need!
- **NEVER shop hungry!** You will find it extremely difficult to resist the temptation to impulse purchase when hungry. So don’t put yourself in that position.

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- **If you must make an impulse purchase, limit yourself to one or two items at most.** It's good to try something new, but only if it's healthy and only if you're certain that you'll have time to actually incorporate it into your meal plan for the week.
- **Frequent the same one or two markets regularly.** By shopping at the same place each week, you will become very familiar with the store and will be able to more quickly navigate through it, thereby saving time and energy!
- **Shop early in the morning, if possible.** Most markets restock at night, so you'll have the best, freshest selections by shopping in the early morning, and most markets are not as busy during early morning hours, which helps save time.
- **Check out Farmer's Markets** for fresh, local produce, they are generally less expensive, or you may wish to join a local CSA to save time and money.
- **Join a Co-Op!** If you have access to a food co-op, definitely take advantage of this opportunity to save money. Most co-ops allow you to purchase food in much larger (bulk) sizes, which can really help you to save money. An example of a great co-op is Azure Standard. You can find out if an Azure co-op is available in your area by contacting them at www.AzureStandard.com.

Schedule a Prep Day (Investing Time Now = Less Time Later)

Scheduling a Prep Day, whenever possible, allows you to get prepared for the week ahead. By prepping ahead, you'll save time and you'll be less stressed out in getting a healthy, homemade meal on the table during busy weeknights. Ideas for the types of tasks you can accomplish by scheduling a Prep Day:

- **Meats:** Cut and divide meat into portions based on your meal plan and freeze (you can even place the meat into a marinade and freeze). Use ground meat to mix and form into meatballs and burgers that can be frozen for later use. I also like to precook and freeze ground meat for use in meals like tacos, chili, soups, etc.
- **Veggies/Fruits:** Chop any veggies/fruits needed for recipes (that can keep well once chopped). For example, I find it super helpful to pre-chop, rinse and store lettuce for salads for the week ahead.
- **Other:** Prepare anything that can be prepared ahead of time, e.g. bake a batch of muffins and freeze them for snacks for the week ahead. Grate cheese, make salad dressings or sauces, etc. and store them in the fridge or freezer.

And during the week, you can still be prepping ahead by doing time-saving steps like:

- Brown extra ground turkey, chicken or beef to use in another dish, like tacos, later in the week.
- Cook extra chicken breasts and then cut some up for another meal such as stir-fry, or pasta dishes.
- Cook extra rice, put it into a container, and refrigerate or freeze for use as a quick side dish with a future meal.

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Other Time-Saving Ideas

- Cut your chicken breasts horizontally into thinner breasts – thinner breasts cook faster and are also a better individual portion size. After cutting the breasts, place them in a ziplock freezer bag with your favorite marinade. Either freeze immediately or place in the frig and use within 24 hours. (After 24 hours, the marinade tends to make the meat too soggy.) To defrost froze chicken/meat, place in frig 24 hours before cooking.
 - If you can grill it, GRILL IT! Grilling is so fast, easy and there's virtually no clean-up necessary. You can grill everything from chicken and turkey to fish and beef. If you don't have a good propane grill, I recommend that you seriously consider investing in one!
 - Grill/Cook double the meat and use it for another meal. (For details, visit <http://TheNourishingHome.com> and read "Cook Once, Eat Twice or More.")
 - For a healthier, yet just as quick breakfast for your kids – phase out all those frozen waffles, pancakes and French toast brands you're purchasing and replace them with your own homemade, healthier versions. Even the healthy brands are not as healthy as homemade and they are much more expensive per serving! Simply plan ahead to make a big breakfast (or have breakfast for dinner) and make a double batch of homemade waffles, pancakes or French toast and individually wrap and place in freezer bags the leftovers. Then simply take them right out of your freezer and place into your toaster oven for a quick, yet healthy breakfast.
 - Since our kids take their lunch to school everyday, healthy and easy kid's lunch box sides are a must. So to save time, the kids and I prep the sides on Sunday afternoon for the week ahead. You can use either mini-snack-sized baggies, or if you want to be more sustainable, use BPA-free plastic containers that can be washed and reused. You can place healthy sides into these, such as fresh cut veggies, fruit, nuts, etc. Here's a secret for making your own fresh-sliced apple sides for the week ahead: Cut apples and place into individual containers with a dash of pineapple juice, shake well to distribute the juice – they will stay fresh all week. And are so yummy!

For more time-saving ideas, visit <http://TheNourishingHome.com>.