

# The Magic of Meal Planning

Meal planning is an important step in making healthy, nutritious, and well-balanced meals. Meal planning involves thinking ahead about what you would like to eat for meals and snacks. Some of the key components can be finding recipes, taking inventory of what you already have, and making a grocery list. Often, we feel that we do not have enough time to meal plan.

Meal planning provides many benefits including:

- Helps you make more nutritious food choices.
- Helps you manage portions and makes cooking less stressful.
- Helps you enjoy a variety of different foods.
- Saves time and [money](#) and reduces [food waste](#).



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**How do you like to meal plan?** Writing out meal ideas on a piece of paper? Using a weekly meal planner template, or jotting down ideas as you go on to your phone? Choose whatever way works best for you and your family!

## Quick Meal Planning Tips and Tricks:

1. Pick a time frame for which you would like to meal plan (e.g., 3-4 days or a full week).
2. Get input from others. Set aside time each week for meal planning and invite other household members to join and give meal suggestions, or ideas.
3. Aim to include a protein, high fibre grain and starch, and a fruit or vegetable in your breakfasts.
4. Aim to follow the well-balanced plate (1/2 plate vegetables, 1/4 plate high fibre grains and starch, 1/4 plate lean protein) when planning out your lunch and dinner meals. For more information look at [Canada's Food Guide](#).
5. Take inventory of the ingredients you already have at home or any ingredients that need to be used up because they are about to spoil.
6. Come up with a meal plan that includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Be creative and consider trying 1-2 new recipes per week. Some people may struggle with planning certain meals. If you find breakfast is more routine and you are hard-pressed to figure out what to have for lunches and dinners, then create a plan that focuses on those meals.



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7. If you are running a tight schedule or odd work shifts, then prepare big batches of a recipe and freeze individual portions for the week. Use seasonal produce as much as possible. It is more flavourful and economical too. Label anything you freeze to avoid confusion.
8. Create your grocery list for the remaining items that you need!



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**For more meal planning tips, tricks, and suggestions see the additional resources below:**

- [Cookspiration](#) by The Dietitians of Canada is a great meal planning website. It has a “My Menu Planner” feature which allows you to choose a goal (e.g., Nut Free or Budget Friendly) and develop a meal plan with the recipes listed on the *Cookspiration* website. Once you have completed your meal plan *Cookspiration* will generate a grocery list. You can download and print your menu planner, grocery list, and recipes for future reference!
- Seven Steps for Quick and Easy Menu Planning: <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Menu-Planning/7-Steps-for-Quick-and-Easy-Menu-Planning.aspx>
- Meal Planning can assist in managing your blood sugars through choosing well-balanced meals. Look at these 7-day meal plans from Diabetes Canada for more meal planning ideas
  - Seven-day meal plans available: Vegan, Mediterranean, Chinese, Gluten-Free, Low-Carbohydrate, Dairy-Free, Healthy Meal Plan and Vegetarian.  
[https://www.diabetes.ca/nutrition---fitness/meal-planning.](https://www.diabetes.ca/nutrition---fitness/meal-planning)
- Sample Meal Plans for Healthy Eating:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-sample-meal-plans-for-healthy-eating.pdf>
- Grocery Shopping the Healthy Way:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-grocery-shopping.pdf>

**Meal Ideas:**

- Wake up to Breakfast Every day <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-wake-up-to-breakfast.pdf>
- What's For Lunch (Arabic, Punjabi, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English)  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page11115.aspx>
- Quick and Easy meals <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-quick-and-easy-meals.pdf>

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