

Meal Prep

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You may be thinking, “Meal prep? That would have been helpful when I was driving in to work, but these days I just run downstairs when I’m hungry and grab something to eat.”

I would argue that meal prep has *never been* more important, especially during these work-from-home, virtual-schooling pandemic days. Meal prep can be an incredible tool to take the stress out of trying to figure out what to make the family (Mealtime anxiety is a real thing. Am I right, parents?!) and can also help us eat more healthfully as we turn to a wholesome homemade meal as opposed to calling for takeout or grabbing a less than optimal snack to tide us over.

What *IS* meal prepping?

Well, it’s whatever you want it to be. For most people, it means picking a day (usually the weekend), batch cooking 3-5 meals and portioning them to eat throughout the week. For others, it might mean just prepping a variety of ingredients (cutting up fruits and veggies, making a salad dressing or a sauce) to make your ‘day of’ cooking easier. Or perhaps you make a few staples and mix and match throughout the week; prepping several veggies, several whole grains and a few lean proteins. ***Meal prepping is what you make of it, literally and figuratively!***

What does this entail?

Step 1: Research recipes and create a menu for the week. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

Pick which meals you struggle with and start with those. For our family, it’s dinner time. We have a short window from the end of work until the kids are demanding, “*Is it time to eat, yet?*” For others it may be breakfast, when you are trying to fit in a workout, get ready for the day and make that 8am zoom meeting. Now, not all recipes make good *meal prep* recipes. Look for the following:

- Some or all of it can be made ahead
- It will hold up in the fridge or freezer
- It reheats easily
- You can easily double the recipe

Step 2: Create a grocery list.

That’s easy enough! Here’s a tip: make a grocery list template that you can reuse weekly. Think headers like: produce, deli, canned goods, pantry items etc. Have the template laid out the way your store is and how you work your way through it. This will make the process go much more smoothly.

Step 3: Go grocery shopping.

Try to do this as close to meal prep day as possible so all the items stay fresh. The first time you do this, you might be surprised at how full your grocery cart is or how much your bill may be. I promise, meal prepping can be, and usually is a very cost-effective process. It just feels a little different when you buy it all at one time.

Also, don’t buy your lettuce on Saturday and then put a salad on your menu for Friday night. Option 1: put your meals with ingredients that won’t last as long at the beginning of the week OR Option 2: take a quick trip about ½ way through the week just to stock up on a few produce items.

Step 4: Create your prep list.

Yep, another list, but trust me you’ll want it. Take a look at what you want to accomplish in your prepping session. Again, this goes back to your individual goal. Then make a simple list so you can stay on track – cut fruit, chop veggies, make salad dressing, roast tofu, make marinade.

Step 5: Pick your day and start cooking!

A lot of people ask, "How long should does this take?" It could take as much as 3 hours or as little as 1-2. Again, make it fit your lifestyle. How can you make it easier?

- Pick recipes that require a different mode of cooking (so that you are not waiting for one meal to come out of the oven before the next one can go in).
- Make sure you have enough storage containers. This has been almost every meal planning rookie's first mistake. Make sure they are freezer, microwave and oven safe.

Meal prep can be daunting, but I promise, you will find your groove. Once you find some recipes that work, you will eventually be able to create a rotation of menus, grocery lists and meal prep checklists that will make life easier. A quick internet search will find you tons of templates. There are even folks out there that share their whole "kit" if you will. Just find someone who's culinary tastes and nutrition goals line up with yours and use them as inspiration.

~Happy Meal Planning!