



**NOURISH
AND THRIVE**
NUTRITION CENTER

Your Ultimate Guide to

Meal Planning

Simplify the art of crafting personalized meal plans. This comprehensive guide leads you through a systematic process, ensuring your meals align perfectly with your preferences, dietary requirements, and lifestyle.

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Meal planning is an act of organizing meals in advance. It involves deciding what you're going to eat for the week, buying the necessary ingredients, and sometimes even prepping your meals ahead of time. At its core, meal planning is about taking control of what you eat. It's not necessarily about strict diets or denying yourself certain foods; rather, it's about creating a structured environment where healthy choices are easier to make.

By dedicating some time to meal planning, you're setting yourself up for a healthier lifestyle. When you know what you're going to eat in advance, you are less likely to opt for unhealthy food choices out of convenience or hunger. Plus, you can better align your food choices with your health goals—whether that's eating more fruits and vegetables, cutting back on processed foods, or managing a medical condition.

Meal planning is the single most impactful thing you can do on a day-to-day basis to improve the nutritional quality of your diet, reduce stress and anxiety associated with last-minute meal prep, and ultimately support health goals like weight management, improved performance, and disease risk reduction.

- Dr. Wendy Bazilian, DrPH, RD

Nutrition Goals

One of the significant benefits of meal planning is its role in meeting nutritional goals. Whether you aim to lose weight, gain muscle, manage a health condition, or simply maintain a balanced diet, meal planning can be a valuable tool. You can strategize your meals and snacks to include a variety of food groups, including fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats. By mapping out your meals, you can ensure that your food choices align with your nutritional needs and health objectives.

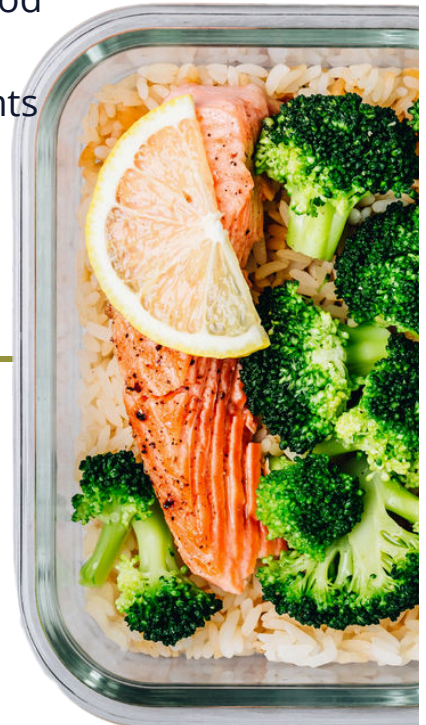
Save Time & Money

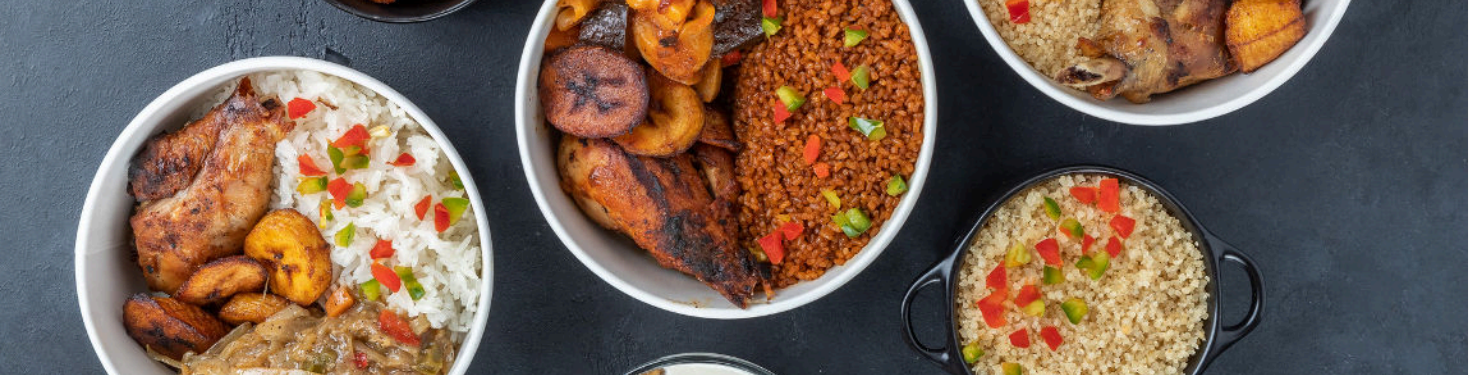
By planning and preparing meals in advance, you can eliminate the daily decision-making process about what to eat, reducing time spent wondering, shopping, and cooking. Pre-planning meals allows you to streamline your grocery shopping by making a specific list of what you need, which can prevent impulse buys or unnecessary purchases. Furthermore, you can take advantage of bulk purchasing and sales for items you know you'll use within your meal plan.

Also, meal planning and bulk cooking can help reduce food waste. By planning out your meals, you'll likely only buy what you need, reducing the chance of unused ingredients going bad in your refrigerator

Reduce Stress

The act of meal planning can foster a sense of organization and competence, which can positively affect your mood and overall mental health. Knowing what you're going to eat can help reduce the daily stress of making meal decisions. Additionally, meal planning can contribute to an improved mood as eating a balanced, nutritious diet is linked with better mental health.





Work with Us

A registered dietitian can help ensure that your meal plan is balanced, fulfilling, and tailored to your unique needs. The dietitians at the Nourish and Thrive Nutrition Center can provide you with in-depth knowledge about the nutrients your body needs, how to meet those needs through food, and how to adjust your diet based on your health goals.



We can also help you understand portion sizes, make healthier swaps in your diet, and learn how to read food labels. Interested in working together? Visit [our website](https://www.nourish-thrive.com) to schedule a 15 minute complimentary discovery call.

Consider Needs and Preferences

When creating your meal plan, it's crucial to factor in your individual dietary needs and preferences. This includes considerations for food allergies, intolerances, dietary restrictions and cultural preferences.

Culture plays a significant role in what we eat. Your culturally familiar and loved foods can—and should—be incorporated into your meal plan. This approach not only makes your meals more enjoyable but also ensures greater adherence to your meal plan.

Mindset

A healthy mindset toward meal planning is key to achieving nutritional goals and maintaining a healthy relationship with food. Here are some practical actions to help improve mindset:

Practice self-compassion: Nobody's perfect. There will be days when you deviate from your meal plan. Instead of beating yourself up about it, practice self-compassion. Understand that everyone has off days and what's important is to get back on track.

Shift your focus: Instead of focusing on what you should cut out or limit in your diet, shift your focus to what you can add. Concentrate on incorporating more nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains into your meals.

Set goals and celebrate progress: Remember to celebrate your achievements, no matter how small they may seem. The only way to see progress is to set goals - but rather than set outcome goals, like lower cholesterol or fewer headaches, try setting culinary goals and trust the process.

An example of behavior-base goals would be:

"Make two no-cook breakfasts this week"

"Prepare one sheet pan dinner before the end of the week"

"Purchase and try hemp seeds this week"



SPECIFIC: What are you trying to accomplish? Use the "W"s to help be precise: who, what, where, when, why

MEASURABLE: Including measures is important so you know how close you are to reaching your goals!

ACHIEVABLE: Make sure you have resources to reach your goals and they are things you CAN make happen.

RELEVANT: The goal should be relevant to YOUR needs and support your values and vision for the future.

TIMED: Goals should have deadlines so you can review and revise when necessary, and develop a schedule for your goals.



Be Flexible

While meal planning is all about structure, it's equally important to ensure that your plan is flexible. Flexibility in meal planning allows for variations in your day-to-day life, including changes in your schedule, unexpected events, or shifts in your appetite.

A flexible meal plan is one that can accommodate these changes. For instance, if you have a dinner planned, but you find yourself not very hungry, you can swap it for a lighter meal. Alternatively, if you're out with friends and have a larger meal, you can adjust your other meals.

Flexible meal planning promotes a healthy relationship with food. It allows you to enjoy a variety of foods, listen to your hunger and fullness cues, and not feel guilty if you deviate from your plan. After all, a meal plan is meant to serve as a helpful guide, not a rigid rulebook.

Remember, the ultimate goal of meal planning is to make healthy eating easier and more enjoyable for you. A flexible meal plan that adapts to your life will be more sustainable and successful in the long run.

Sign up for a FREE trial of our meal planning service that is flexible and customizable to accommodate your needs and preferences.

The Mealtime Method

Introducing The Mealtime Method! This method simplifies the process of creating balanced, nutritious, and tasty meals weekly by breaking down meal components each week into six categories, each with a recommended number of selections. These categories are:

Low Glycemic Vegetables (6 selections): Also referred to as non-starchy vegetables, these are veggies that have a low Glycemic Index (GI) and thus cause a slower and smaller rise in blood glucose levels, which is beneficial for maintaining consistent energy levels and aiding weight management.

Starchier Vegetables and Whole Grains (5 selections): These are your sources of complex carbohydrates, which provide sustained energy. They're also often rich in dietary fiber, which aids digestion and helps you feel full longer.

Fruits (4 selections): Fruits are packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, and provide a natural sweetness to meals.

Proteins (3 selections): Proteins are vital for building and repairing tissues, making hormones, and supporting a healthy immune system. They also keep you feeling satisfied and full after a meal.

Healthy Fats (2 selections): Healthy fats, like those found in avocados, nuts, and fish, are essential for absorbing vitamins and protecting your heart and brain.

Flavor Enhancers/Seasonings (1-2 selections): These can be dressings, sauces, or spices that add flavor and excitement to your meals, making healthy eating enjoyable and sustainable.

The Mealtime Method

The key to success with The Mealtime Method is personalization and flexibility - feel free to adjust your selections and meals to suit your tastes, dietary needs, and lifestyle. Start with adding the foods that are in the heavy rotation in your household currently. Once you've completed your list, you can use it as a guide to build your meals for the week by selecting a variety of recipes or cooking techniques (like sheet pan meals, skillet meals, stir fries, etc.)

Here is an example of what the method looks like [a blank worksheet is provided at the end of this eBook for you to get started on your own]:

Nutrition for Optimal Metabolism

Week 1

Follow the guide below for weekly focus foods that will be used with kitchen and pantry essentials to create your meals. Change items in each category based on preferences and swap for similar foods. For example, if you don't prefer kale, replace with another leafy green like romaine. Have a nut allergy? Replace almonds with hemp seeds. Search meal plans for recipes that you're comfortable with and pull into your planner for the week.

6	5	4	3	2	1
VEGETABLES	GRAINS/BEANS/STARCHES	FRUITS	PROTEINS	FATS	SEASONINGS
Broccoli Carrots Radicchio Zucchini Butternut squash Kale	Quinoa Brown Rice Sweet Potato Whole-grain pasta [shape of choice]* Oats	Apples Blueberries Cantaloupe Pineapple Convenience items: Instant oatmeal Pre-chopped sweet potato Frozen cauliflower rice	Beef Salmon Tofu	Tahini Walnuts	Dressing: Lemon-Garlic Blend: BBQ
			Suggested Meal Plan Recipes: Quick BBQ Salmon Savory Kale Chips Lentil Stuffed Peppers Overnight Apple Pie Oats Kale Lime Sauté Creamy Cauliflower Soup Mediterranean Salmon or Shrimp Packet		

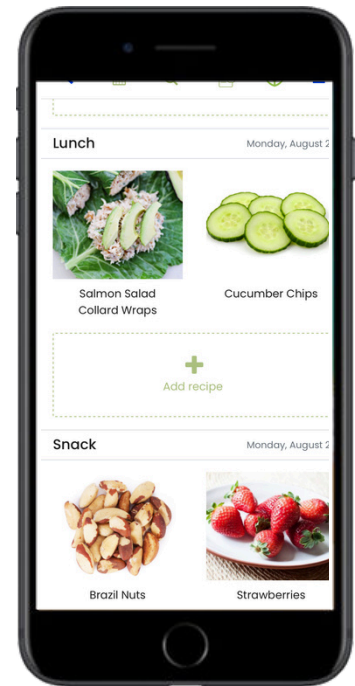
*gluten-free if necessary

Basic Meal Planning Strategies

Here are some practical strategies you can use to make meal planning a part of your routine. These strategies include using The Mealttime Method, meal planning apps, meal prepping, and planning leftovers.

The Mealttime Method: Complete the Mealttime Method worksheet at the end of this book. Fill your worksheet with foods that meet your taste preferences, and support your personal health goals.

Meal Planning App: Meal planning has become much more convenient with the help of technology. Find an app that not only allows you to plan your meals for the week or month but also generates shopping lists based on your meal plans, counts calories, and offers a range of recipes to choose from that are specific to your nutrition plan. Apply your Mealttime Method selections to the selection of recipes.




Meal Prepping: This is a strategy where you dedicate a portion of your time - typically on the weekend - to preparing meals or meal components for the upcoming week. This could involve chopping vegetables, cooking grains or proteins, or fully preparing meals that can be refrigerated or frozen and easily reheated. Meal prepping can save you a lot of time during the week and make healthy eating more convenient.

Planning Leftovers: While planning your meals, consider recipes that yield more than one meal. This not only reduces cooking frequency but also makes use of leftovers in a planned way, thereby reducing food waste.



Quick & Easy Recipes



Incorporating quick and easy recipes into your meal plan using foods from your Mealtime Method worksheets can save you time and reduce the stress of meal preparation. These recipes usually require fewer ingredients, simpler cooking methods, and less cleanup. Here, we'll provide a sample of healthy, quick, no-cook, and easy-to-prepare food combinations that can serve as meals or snacks:

Greek Yogurt Parfait: Layer Greek yogurt with fresh berries (like strawberries, blueberries, or raspberries), and top it off with a sprinkle of hemp seeds.

Avocado Toast: Top a slice of whole-grain bread with smashed avocado, a squeeze of lemon, and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. For added protein, you can layer on some smoked salmon or a boiled egg.

Chia Pudding: Mix chia seeds with almond milk (or any other milk of your choice) and let it sit overnight in the fridge. In the morning, top it with slices of banana.

Cottage Cheese Bowl: Fill a bowl with cottage cheese and top it with sliced peaches or pears, and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Nut Butter Banana Bites: Slice a banana into rounds, spread a small amount of almond or peanut butter on each slice, and sandwich two slices together.

Veggie Hummus Wrap: Spread a whole-grain tortilla with hummus, then layer on a variety of fresh veggies like bell peppers, cucumbers, and spinach. Roll it up for a quick, no-cook snack or meal.

Grocery Shopping Tips

Efficient grocery shopping is a key aspect of successful meal planning. Here are some tips to shop healthily and economically, and to avoid common grocery shopping pitfalls:

Make a List: You have flexibility here - as you get more comfortable in applying the Mealtime Method, your worksheet can serve as a loose grocery list. It's okay to shop for whole foods and figure out the recipes later. You can also use your meal planning app, generate a shopping list and stick to it. Both approaches can help you avoid impulse purchases, save money, and ensure you don't forget any key ingredients.

Don't Shop Hungry: You're more likely to make impulsive and less healthy choices if you shop when you're hungry.

Read Food Labels: To make healthier choices, learn to read and understand food labels. Look out for the amount of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar, and ensure the product contains a good amount of fiber and protein.



Buy in Bulk: Items such as whole grains, canned goods, and frozen fruits and vegetables can be bought in larger quantities when they're on sale. They last longer and can be used in multiple meals.

Worksheet

NOTES:



VEGETABLES



**GRAINS/BEANS/
STARCHES**



FRUITS



PROTEINS



FATS



SEASONINGS

Dressing:
Seasoning Blend:

Suggested Meal Plan Recipes:

Convenience items:

Interested in
learning more?

Let's Connect



732-947-0925



hello@nourishthrive.info



@nourishandthrive_rdn



Find us on Facebook



Nourish and Thrive Nutrition Center
101 Town Center Drive, Suite 113
Warren, NJ 07059



Elisa England
MS, RDN

Ellen Petrosino MS,
RDN, IFNCP

