

# Meal Planning Tips

Here are some ideas for helping your family plan and prepare healthy meals while saving both time and money. Let's get started!

- **Use a calendar.**  
A large, inexpensive calendar can help with meal planning. Use it to keep track of family activities as well as your daily dinner meals.
- **Be organized.**  
Do an inventory of your kitchen when you are planning meals for the week. Plan meals that use up needed ingredients, and use this time to quickly organize and clean out old items.
- **Get the family involved.**  
Allow the whole family to be part of the meal planning process. Children will feel empowered to help with important eating decisions, and their involvement will encourage them to try new foods.
- **Make a list.**  
One of the easiest ways to plan meals is to make a list of what you have. Use these items to create simple meals. Lots of pasta? How about spaghetti and a green salad? Choose one day each week to plan out meals: write down your menu and the list of the ingredients you need from the supermarket.
- **Stock up for easy morning meals.**  
By having healthy ingredients on hand, you can make breakfast simple. Whole-grain cereals, bread, yogurt, milk, cheese, fruit, peanut butter, etc., can easily be combined to provide the nutrition needed to start the day (for example, peanut butter on whole-grain toast with a tangerine).
- **Prep ahead.**  
Chop vegetables like peppers and onions ahead of time and store in the refrigerator. Bake muffins or quick breads and freeze for later use during the week. You can also precook ground meat and freeze it to add to tacos, spaghetti or chili.
- **Plan for leftovers.**  
When cooking proteins like whole chicken or ground meat, cook extra for use the next night. For instance, leftover chicken can be mixed with chicken broth, frozen mixed vegetables and pasta for a quick soup. Leftover chili can be used to top tortilla chips or a baked potato for a quick dinner as well. You can also pack up leftovers in containers for lunches to go.
- **Keep a stocked pantry.**  
A well-stocked pantry makes meal prep easy on busy nights. Pasta, instant brown rice, canned beans, diced tomatoes, canned fruits and vegetables, recipe-ready soups, etc., can all be used for simple meals.



## Kids in the Kitchen

If you are looking for ways to get your children involved in the kitchen, here are a few ideas:

- Have them choose a new fruit or vegetable in the store, and include them in the washing/preparing process.
- Even young children can help toss a green salad.
- Let them measure ingredients.
- Have them crack eggs.
- Have them set the table.