

Now that they're back to school...

Time to Get Back to Routine!

Summer routines are ending as we send our children back to school. Not only are we shopping for school clothing and supplies, but we are also replacing casual summer lifestyles with a more structured routine that is compatible with school and work schedules. That means spending a little extra time to plan family meals.



Here are some tips for getting back into the routine with meal planning and an easy recipe to get you started!

1 Create a List of Family-Favorite Meals

Arrange a list of all the meals that your family raves about! This will help so much when you are running late or forgot to pull something from the freezer before leaving for work in the morning. Use the family favorite list when preparing your weekly grocery list and purchase the items in advance to make the family favorites. You will have the foods on hand to keep that busy schedule moving right along! Update the list with new entrees as your family discovers new favorites.


Need help with menu planning? No problem, check out www.MyFitnessPal.com or www.Mealime.com for easy and customizable menu planning.

2 Prepare for the Week's Dinners

Review family schedules before menu planning to identify days that may be super busy. For those super-packed days, consider a "clean the refrigerator theme," a crockpot meal, or leftovers night. Don't forget steamed frozen vegetables, fresh fruit, or packaged salads that make a quick addition to any meal—and are packed full of nutrition!

Need help with quick and easy side dishes that can be made in a flash? Consider www.sparkrecipes.com that not only hosts delicious healthy recipes but also allows you to filter the preparation time. Even if you only have 5 minutes, Spark Recipes has the meals that meet your schedule.

3 Map Out Workday Meals

Does it feel easier to eat healthy at work? You might be right! Busy work schedules generally allow a few breaks and one lunch hour, making meal and snack planning efficient. Watch for The Right Choice for A Healthier You heart apple symbol  in vending, micro markets, and foodservice for healthy eating on the go!

Looking for recipes and helpful cooking tips? www.therightchoiceforahealthieryou.com can help weekly meal planning with videos and recipes at your fingertips!



4 Make a Shopping List

Set aside time on the weekend to review your grocery list and upcoming meals. After arranging your meal plan for the week, go through each meal and make a list of ingredients needed. By checking your inventory, you will avoid buying ingredients you already have on hand. Leave a pad of paper on the counter or on the refrigerator to jot down ingredients you realize you will need as you are preparing other meals in your kitchen. Set yourself up for success!

5 Sunday Prep Day

Spending an hour or two over the weekend to accomplish some tasks can go a long way toward making things quicker and easier for you during the week ahead! Use your prep day to accomplish tasks such as these:

- **Meats:** Cut and divide meat into portions based on your menus 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.
- **Vegetables and Fruits:** Chop any veggies and fruits needed for recipes.
- **Prepare items that can be made ahead of time:** bake a batch of healthy muffins and freeze them for snacks for the week ahead. Arrange side dishes, make salad dressings or sauces, pre-portion meal ingredients, make a big bowl of fruit salad that is ready to go any time of the day.
- **Brown extra ground turkey, chicken, or beef,** to use in another dish.
- **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 or add to soup.

6 Plan for Healthy Eating & Snacking

- **Leftovers, leftovers, leftovers.** When creating your meal plan, consider which dinners lend themselves to also being a great lunch. Rather than serving the same thing for lunch, think of ways to add zip to your leftovers, such as turning leftover grilled chicken breasts into Easy Lemon Chicken.
- **Provide balanced food choices.** Children need a healthy balance of protein, carbs, and fats for sustained energy and optimal learning. Foods such as whole grains, brown rice, fruits, and veggies provide a good source of healthy carbohydrates. Yogurt, cheese, eggs, meats, and beans provide necessary protein, and healthy fats found in nuts, meats, avocados, and low-milk dairy products help support energy. Providing a balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fats will guarantee proper nutrition for all age groups, particularly active children.
- **Bring your kids into the kitchen.** Including your kids in grocery shopping and meal preparation is great culinary experience! And did you know that kids are more likely to eat what they help make: the same goes with packing lunch. Allow them to make some healthy choices about what to include in their lunches. Avoid food fights and aim for comprise that balances healthy options with comfort foods that the whole family can work together on.

EASY BLACK BEAN SOUP

- 2 / 15 ounce cans black beans
 - 1 / 15 ounce can diced tomatoes with green chilies, drained
 - 30 ounces vegetable broth
 - 1.5 teaspoons cumin
 - 1 teaspoon black pepper
 - 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 - 1 / 15 ounce can black beans
 - 3 cups hot cooked brown rice
 - Plain nonfat Greek yogurt
1. Drain some of the liquid from 2 cans black beans.
 2. Put 2 cans black beans, diced tomatoes with green chile peppers, 1 cup vegetable broth, cumin, black pepper, and cayenne pepper into a blender and blend until smooth; pour into a saucepan and add remaining vegetable broth and 1 can black beans. Place saucepan over medium heat, bring mixture to a simmer, and cook for 15 minutes.
 3. Put 1/2 cup hot brown rice into each of 6 bowls. Ladle soup over rice and top with 1 tablespoon Greek yogurt.

