

Meal Planning Made Simple

Supports: Building Block 6 — Portions & the Balanced Plate

Why It Matters

A little planning takes a lot of daily decisions off your plate. When you have a loose sense of the week's meals and a few ingredients prepped, you spend less time wondering what's for dinner and more time actually enjoying it. Meal planning isn't about rigid rules or elaborate spreadsheets — it's about making the choices you already want to make a bit easier. The goal is a rhythm you can sustain, not a perfect week.

What to Know

Start where you are

The best routine is the one you'll actually keep. A helpful question to ask is, "Could I still be doing this in five years?" If the answer is no, scale it down. Try one new habit at a time — keep what fits your life and let go of the rest. New routines take a while to feel natural, so be patient with yourself and don't get discouraged along the way.

Ease into it — progress, not perfection. You don't have to overhaul everything at once. Start with half regular and half whole-grain or bean-based pasta, and try swaps like spaghetti squash or zucchini noodles whenever you feel ready. Small, gradual changes tend to stick.

A simple weekly rhythm

- Pick a planning time — many people find the weekend works — and jot down the week's meals and a grocery list.
- As soon as groceries are home, wash and cut produce and portion snacks so they're ready to grab.
- Batch-cook a base or two, like brown rice, quinoa, or beans, to mix and match all week.
- Plan for leftovers with a designated leftover night, and freeze extras for a quick meal later.
- Shop when you're not hungry and stick to your list; ordering online for pickup can save time and impulse buys.

Cook with your household in mind

If you share meals with others, their tastes matter too, and changes land better when everyone feels included. Try build-your-own meals — a taco bar or grain-bowl night — so each person customizes their plate. Cook one base and let people top it their own way, blend new ingredients in gradually, and go at your family's pace rather than expecting everyone to shift overnight. Inviting family to help choose recipes or add to the grocery list builds buy-in, too.

Find recipes. For ready-made ideas, see the Flexible Meal Plan & Recipe Collection handout and Appendix C (A Year in the Kitchen) — a season's worth of recipes to pull from when inspiration runs low.

Try This

Choose one small planning habit to try this coming week — just one — and notice how it feels to have a little more decided in advance.

- ? What's one meal-planning habit you could realistically keep for years?
- ? Which prep step would save you the most stress on a busy weeknight?
- ? How could you involve the people you cook for in the plan?