



## Meal Planning and Prep Tips

We have all heard the phrase fail to prepare and prepare to fail. As blunt as it sounds, it is very true when it comes to our nutrition. We all live busy lives and have different work, personal and family commitments that need to be seen to daily. Suddenly, dinner time arrives without anything planned. The solution is something quick and easy, like throwing a pizza in the oven or running to the local chipper, resulting in a meal that may not be overly nutritious or balanced. If you plan out your weekly meals, you'll be saving time, money, and stress so you can focus on work and everyday life. It does not have to be time consuming or fearful if you follow these simple tips:

### 1. Choose your recipes

Before you start making a shopping list or prepping, you need some recipe

inspiration. Honestly, planning out your meals is so much more appealing when the meal you are making is appetising. You might buy yourself a new cookbook but it's also good to have a repertoire of go-to websites you can refer to when you are lacking some inspiration for a quick and tasty meal. Here are some of handy ones:

- [www.bordbia.ie/recipes/](http://www.bordbia.ie/recipes/)
- [www.easyfood.ie](http://www.easyfood.ie)
- [www.ilovecooking.ie](http://www.ilovecooking.ie)
- [www.bbcgoodfood.co.uk](http://www.bbcgoodfood.co.uk)
- [www.naturalbornfeeder.com](http://www.naturalbornfeeder.com) (for the veggies)
- [www.bonappetit.com](http://www.bonappetit.com)
- [www.jamieoliver.com](http://www.jamieoliver.com)
- [www.pinchofyum.com](http://www.pinchofyum.com)

### 2. Plan it out by meal

Now that you have some tasty recipes to try, start by planning out what ones you will use for your 3 main meals breakfast, lunch and dinner for the next 5 days. Remember if you have a big family, do not forget about your own meals alongside everyone else's. It's very easy to plan out everyone else's meals and snacks over the week, leaving the planner to rely on leftovers or quick fixes.

If you are looking for nutritionally balanced meals, make sure that each meal has a protein, carbohydrate, colour from fruit or vegetables and some healthy fats. This basic principle will ensure that all the essential macro and micronutrients are met over the day.

Remember it does not need to be a new meal every day. In fact, it can make your life easier if you have the same lunch two days in a row as it saves time on meal prep (we will discuss batch cooking in more detail below.) It can also be handy to use the same ingredient for multiple dishes e.g. using cajun spice for lunch and dinner or having garlic in the press for different dinner recipes.



### 3. Start making your shopping list.

Once the meal plan is sorted, now you need to get the food into the house. Remember that to create a healthy habit we need to make it easy – if the food is in the house, it will make it easier to make the meal. When creating a shopping list, it can be easier to break it down into food groups to save you from running back and forth in the shop such as:

- Protein (meat/chicken/fish/egg etc)
- Bread (sliced pan/wrap/bagels)
- Carbs (rice/pasta/risotto/noodles)
- Fruit + vegetables
- Dairy (milk, cheese, yogurts etc)
- Staples (olive oil, salt, pepper, tea bags)
- Miscellaneous

Top tip for going food shopping: Never go hungry. It will result in a basket full of bread, biscuits and chocolate. Get yourself a snack beforehand to prevent the onset of the awful hunger pangs and carb cravings.

#### 4. Utilise batch cooking

This is not an essential element of the plan, but it can make your life a lot easier mid-week. Even by simply making dinner big enough to last 2 nights, it can save the hassle of cooking two dinners. It doesn't have to be entire meals either. These are some simple examples of how it can be done:

- Roast chicken fillets on Sunday for chicken wraps for lunch Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.
- Roast vegetables in bulk to add to salads and meals during the week
- Cook off pasta for a few days for pasta pesto at lunch time
- Make up overnight oats for two nights in a row for breakfast
- Cook extra portions of dinner on Monday for a quick fix on Tuesday when you have an appointment after work
- Prepare a salad dressing on Sunday to last you the whole week
- Prepare bags of frozen fruit to add to smoothies

If you are someone who has a very busy job than this can make a real difference to your time during the week.

Another great kitchen appliance is the slow cooker. This really is a time and stress saver for busy lifestyles. The smug feeling of walking in the door after a day of work to the smell of your dinner ready to eat is truly heart-warming on a cold wintery night.

*If you have any questions about how Food Choice can help your organisation, please contact Dr Fiona Geaney today at [f.geaney@foodchoiceatwork.com](mailto:f.geaney@foodchoiceatwork.com) to set up a call.*