



CHALLENGE: *Plan your meals in advance*

The biggest barriers to cooking food at home are: not knowing what to cook, and not having the ingredients on hand to cook. Sitting down to plan meals in advance (even planning which meals you'll eat out) only takes a few minutes and will make preparing meals at home much more feasible. This month try to plan your meals (and your shopping trips) in advance so that you are sure to have all of your ingredients on hand to make cooking a breeze!

What is meal planning?

Meal planning is simply organizing yourself in order to prepare a meal. Many of us already do a version of this when we make grocery lists, whether we chart it all out a month in advance or wing it by shopping for the evening's meal based on whatever looks good at the market. Meal planning is quite personal and what works for one person may not be right for another. The goal is to find a process that is both enjoyable and effective.

STEP 1: ASSESS YOUR MEAL NEEDS

Schedules can vary from week to week, so take a look at your calendar to determine what type of planning you'll need to do for the week ahead. Here are some factors to consider:

Number of meals – Consider everyone's schedules as you set out to plan. This will quickly give you an inventory of how many meals you'll need during the week. Be sure to consider any meals you plan to eat out or where food will be provided for you.

Your time – If you have a busy week coming up, don't plan to make any time-consuming meals. Instead, stick with slow-cooker or make-ahead meals that can be served up in a hurry. Planning for take-out is okay too – put it on the schedule and choose ahead of time what you'll order so you're sure to make a nourishing choice.

STEP 2: CHOOSE RECIPES

For many people, browsing recipes online and reading through cookbooks can be a joy when it's done leisurely, but can be a burden when you're trying to plan something for a specific meal. The trick here is to keep the "fun" in recipe browsing and come up with a simple way to store meal ideas so you'll know where to look when you need inspiration.

Write down your go-tos – Make a list of those easy recipes that you make often and that everyone loves. Keep this list posted on your refrigerator to remind you of all the simple recipes you already know and can choose from when you plan your weekly meals. Hopefully you'll be able to add to this list over time.

Find a few new dishes to try – Spend some free time browsing for recipes. Search online sources like the *MyFitnessPal Blog*, *Bon Appetit*, *Food Network*, and *Eating Well*. You can also check out the list of recipes in the Navigate Wellbeing portal. Find a way to store these recipes, either by adding them to an online database like *Pinterest* or *Paprika*, or by printing them and filing them in a binder. If using the Navigate Wellbeing site you can save them to your favorites within the site. That way they are easy to find if you want to make it again. When you're making a meal plan for the week, don't plan to make all new recipes. Aim for only one or two new recipes each week and enjoy your go-tos or leftovers during the rest of the week.

Check what's on sale – before you select your recipes for the week, check your grocery circulars to see what's on sale for the week and plan meals around those items.

Plan for leftovers – Even if you don't have a tolerance for the exact same meal repeated night after night, it's possible to prepare a large batch of one item to be used in multiple meals throughout the week. Either way, try to make your cooking always do double duty. Make a little extra of everything, and if you don't want it right away, freeze it.

STEP 3: WRITE IT DOWN AND MAKE YOUR GROCERY LIST

Now that you know how many meals you'll need, how much time you'll have to prepare meals, what's on sale, and have resources for easy, healthy recipes, it's time to sit down and write it out. Some people write it on a calendar, others a 3x5 card, and others post a weekly menu on the fridge. Posting the weekly menu somewhere visible will help reduce the frequency of being asked, "what's for dinner" by either yourself or your family.

Keep your past meal plans – Your past meal plans will be your greatest resource when it comes to planning meals in the future. You really only need about 4 different weekly meal plans that you can rotate through each month during the year. You may want to substitute seasonal vegetables or try new recipes, but don't feel like you always need to recreate the wheel.

STEP 4: STICK TO IT!

Coming home and knowing exactly what you'll prepare for dinner and having all the ingredients on hand to cook is a wonderful feeling at the end of a long day. If you find yourself tempted to skip your planned meal in favor of quick take-out or stopping at the store for something else entirely, consider what you might do differently as you plan next week's meals to avoid this issue. Perhaps you would be more likely to cook if you chose quicker meals or maybe it's not realistic for you to cook at home 5 days per week and need to allow for more eating out. Whatever the case, make any necessary adjustments and try again next week.

Name_____

Month Completed_____

Harker School Wellness Program / **Meal Planning Challenge**

Use this log to plan & list your meals each day. Try to plan for at least a week at a time and incorporate healthy choices. Aim for at least 2 planned meals each day (i.e. – B: Oatmeal, L: Harker Lunch, D: Chicken, Rice & Salad) Submit completed log to HR to earn 10 wellness points. (100 points max in this category)

Week 1

Day 1 _____
Day 2 _____
Day 3 _____
Day 4 _____
Day 5 _____
Day 6 _____
Day 7 _____

Week 2

Day 8 _____
Day 9 _____
Day 10 _____
Day 11 _____
Day 12 _____
Day 13 _____
Day 14 _____

Week 3

Day 15 _____
Day 16 _____
Day 17 _____
Day 18 _____
Day 19 _____
Day 20 _____
Day 21 _____

Week 4

Day 22 _____
Day 23 _____
Day 24 _____
Day 25 _____
Day 26 _____
Day 27 _____
Day 28 _____

Signature_____ Date_____

I, the employee named above, guarantee that the information contained in this verification is true and accurate and I understand that HR may verify any forms submitted for the purpose of obtaining a wellness discount. I understand that any inaccurate and/or false statements on this form may lead to the loss of all or a portion of my wellness discount.

To receive credit, this form must be submitted to HR within 30 days of completion and no later than December 5, 2019.