

# *A Simplified Guide to Meal Planning*



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**EASY-TO-USE WEEK-TO-WEEK PLANNING**  
PLUS MOTIVATIONAL TIPS, GROCERY SHOPPING  
GUIDES, & MORE!

# Finding Inspiration

"No one told me marriage was asking 'what do you want for dinner?' and then having to figure that out every day until I die."

## *Why I Meal Plan*

Back when my husband first moved in with me, I remember saying something along the lines of, "can you believe some people struggle to cook every night?"

I was 24 years old, without kids or a dog at the time. It was just Danny and I. The hubris I had at that time.

The longer Danny & I have lived together, the harder it is to cook every night. And that's because our lives have changed and evolved. We are both working long hours: Danny as a teacher, me as a freelance writer. We have a 4-year-old human child and a 7-year-old pet child, both of whom require way more work than you would ever suspect. (Those twice a day walks have helped Remus's weight, but man! It really takes it out of me!)

Meal planning, and meal prepping, has become essential to our weekly and monthly routines. Otherwise, we spend too much money on food (even just popping into the grocery store to pick up something for a last-minute meal can add up fast), eat things that don't make us feel good, and spend more time thinking about food than actually enjoying a meal together.

With Forrest being 4 now, we are working hard to spend every meal we can sitting at the table together. Most mornings, I eat breakfast with Forrest before we start our day, which means I have to plan breakfast for both him & I. For these quick meals, I like to have things planned & made ahead, like waffles or pancakes, plus fresh fruit.

Planning our meals lets us enjoy our meals together with less stress, healthier foods, and more family time. I hope this guide can help you too!

# Did You Know...

33%

that's how much the frequency of family dinners has declined in the last 20 years. We know that children benefit from family dinners: they perform better academically, are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and have better relationships with their parents.

Americans now spend a higher percentage of their food budget on restaurants (50.3%) than they do on groceries (49.7%). While there is nothing wrong with occasional restaurant meals, that can add up fast for most families!



## *Where do you find inspiration?*

Decision fatigue. That's what we mean when we talk about being so exhausted at the end of the day that you just can't decide. Trying to decide what to eat, when it's so easy to drive thru your local fast food joint, feels like one more task that's just too dang much.

But if you meal plan, you have everything decided in advance, everything purchased in advance. And if you meal prep, you can have some parts prepared in advance. But how do you pick recipes?

For me, I often fall back on the same 5-10 basic recipes, altering them week-to-week so they stay exciting. For example, we might have spaghetti and meatballs every week. But one week, it might be turkey meatballs with pesto & lentil pasta; then, the next week, it might be Banza pasta with red sauce and traditional meatballs. These are easy recipes, I can make the meatballs in advance, and throw everything together in the evening before dinner. On the next page, we'll pick some recipes you love!



*10 dinners I can make  
this month:*

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*10 lunches I can make  
ahead:*

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*When it comes to breakfast, we like to eat: \_\_\_\_\_*

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Can that be made ahead?: Yes! [ ] No! [ ]*

# *But I need help...*

Some of us didn't grow up cooking and don't have a background of meals we know how to cook fast. That's ok! Want to start with some basics? Here are a few great resources that I highly recommend:

- Find a cookbook you love. I love the Better Homes & Gardens ringbound cookbooks for basic, easy recipes. These recipes are tested and always turn out great, plus they have instructions throughout, making them great for new cooks.
- If you're more intermediate in your cooking skills, but just need some inspiration, I frequently use Pinterest to pick new recipes to try week-to-week or mix up my week-to-week staples.
- Follow food & cooking blogs and Instagram accounts for inspiration and ideas on a day-to-day basis.
- You don't have to plan each meal down to everything. For example, I might put "salad" as my lunch every single day--but I keep a variety of salad fixings, like croutons, leftover proteins from dinner the night before, seeds, dressings, and veggies, to mix it up depending on what I feel like eating every single day.

Most importantly, it's ok to find this process overwhelming at first. Find a method that works for you, whether that is planning every meal every single day, or just planning your weekday meals, giving yourself more freedom on the weekends.

In this guide, I've included a weekly meal planner to use week-to-week, as well as a weekly grocery shopping list you can fill out at the same time. At the end, you'll also find a worksheet for writing out ways to keep yourself motivated.

# Weekly Meal planner

month: \_\_\_\_\_

week: \_\_\_\_\_

budget: \_\_\_\_\_

## Breakfast

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s

su

## Lunch

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su

## Dinner

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su

## Snack/Treat

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w

h

f

s

su

# Gracery List

month: \_\_\_\_\_

week: \_\_\_\_\_

budget: \_\_\_\_\_

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Blank lined area for writing the second column of the grocery list.





# Keep It Up!

*I'm Meal Planning Because:*

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*3 Ways to Stay on Track:*

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*How Can My Family Help:*

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*When Times Get Hard...*

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# Thanks for downloading!

*I hope you found this guide helpful!*

With all things, my intention is always to help other professional women & mothers like me, who want to make the best decisions for themselves and their families... without feeling like they're making huge sacrifices.

Remember: it's ok to deviate from your meal plan if you need it for your mental health. It's ok to find that meal planning isn't right for you and your family. This isn't a one-size-fits-all idea and it's not perfect for every person. The most important thing is trying something new, finding ways to make mealtimes work for you & your life, and finding what works for you!

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