MEAL PLANNING:
A KEY INGREDIENT TO HEALTHY EATING

Meal planning is one of the best things you can do to set yourself up for healthy eating success. While it takes some discipline and time, the benefits are well worth it. With meal planning, you make most of your eating decisions at once, in a calm, focused manner. Although you might need to spend 30 minutes or more deciding on meals, finding recipes and making your grocery list, overall you save time because you don't have to spend time each night figuring out what to cook or make extra trips to the store. With good planning, you can also save money by reducing food waste and eating out less

Helpful tips to get you started with meal planning:

1. How many meals do you need?

Take a few moments to think about what you have going on in the week ahead. Take a quick inventory of everyone's plans to get a rough idea of how many meals you'll need.

2. How much time do you have to cook?

Some days you may have time to make a more elaborate meal. Some days you might need to use your crockpot, so food is ready at the end of a long day. Other times you may have very little time to cook and need a "semi-homemade" meal, and then there will be days when preparing dinner will be next to impossible (plan to use leftovers on these nights).

3. Decide on meals

Having a theme for each night of the week such as Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday, etc. can keep things fun and help give structure to the meal. Consider creating a master recipe list. Having a list of go-to meals you know work for you and your family is one of the easiest ways to expedite the meal planning process. Every time you find a new recipe you love, add it to the master list. Many recipe websites allow you to save your favorites to a recipe box. However, if you use multiple sites it can be hard to remember which site contains which recipes. Using Pinterest to pin the recipes you love is a great way to save all your online recipes in one place. If you're more of a paper person, consider printing out the recipes and placing them in a binder for easy reference. Consider overlapping ingredients to minimize waste and cooking with a plan for leftovers to make the most of your food budget and time. If you want to eat better for less, shop seasonal produce and sales.

4. Make your grocery list and shop

Once you have your meals planned, you 're ready to make your grocery list. Write down all the ingredients you need and be sure to check to see what you already have on hand. Don't forget to add staples and snacks like yogurt, cereal, bread, milk, eggs, fruit, rice, nuts, etc. Save time and frustration by grouping foods in the order you find them in the store. Try not to shop when you are hungry and stick to your list.

5. Start prepping food

Wash produce, chop vegetables, measure out spices, cook a big batch brown rice, bake chicken or otherwise prep what you can in advance if possible.

Resources:
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/meals.html
https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/budget/budget-weekly-meals

fitwell.recreation.ucla.edu   FITWELL   UCLAREC