

5 Meal Planning Hacks You Need to Start Using Today

One of the best habits for eating healthy, avoiding poor food choices, and weight loss is meal planning. There has been quite a bit of research done demonstrating that habits and preparation are the best way to ensure a proper diet and healthy habits maintain over time.

This is not always easy however, in the course of our busy and hectic day-to-day lives it certainly doesn't always seem like we have time to cook full meals of farm-to-table food, not to mention the resistance you may encounter is you're cooking for a spouse or children.

Use these 5 meal planning hacks as soon as possible to make meal planning easy, inexpensive and a functional part of your healthy lifestyle!

1. Stock up on the inexpensive staples in bulk

Meal planning can be an expensive proposition; not all of us are chef's or run a full kitchen and it is costly to always use the latest recommended diet products or specialty items. The best strategy is to leverage our resources for the important ingredients that need to be fresh and stock up on those other items in bulk.

Beans, tomatoes, spices, frozen fruit and vegetables and more can add up to huge savings over time and make meal prep much easier knowing that we are well stocked in many of our ingredients ahead of time.

2. Make a plan prior to visiting the store

We've all been there and we've all also failed the grocery store temptation. Whether it is the shiny buy one, get one free sign on a snack we know we don't need, or the alluring scent of freshly prepared food, when we shop hungry and without a plan we make poor decisions, tend to buy the foods we know we shouldn't and spend money we know we shouldn't.

The key to resisting these urges is having a plan ahead of time of exactly what we need, how much we need and sticking to that list. Spending the extra 10 minutes

prior to shopping to make a detailed list will help us to get exactly what we need and sidestep the traps and temptations of our local grocer.

3. Invest in portable storage to make meals easy to access.

Meal prep and planning is a time-consuming process that can take time and energy that we do not readily have, especially during the middle of a busy week. One of the best and easiest strategies to avoid this pitfall is to make an investment in portable food storage both for at home and on the go.

To minimize the time and energy cost, preparing as many meals as possible when we have the time is critical to maintaining our goals throughout the week. In addition, having the right meals already prepped and made, with all the equipment needed, makes it easier when we are in a rush to grab a healthy meal and get going rather than trusting our willpower to avoid fast food or other options that may be more convenient.

4. Use (or get) a slow cooker

One of the biggest pitfalls in diet and healthy eating is the after-work rushed dinner, pizza order or drive through pick up because it's been a long day at work and we simply want to go home and relax rather than cook a whole dinner and all the effort and logistics needed to pull that off.

Unfortunately, this almost always leads to regret later on and the kind of negative reinforcement that crashes many diets. However, in the morning or the night before when we are more mentally fresh, popping the requisite ingredients into a slow cooker that will cook while we're at work makes for a great option when we get home as the food is already cooked and we just have to serve and eat!

These cookers are a fantastic investment and with a little creativity can make some very tasty meals as well!

5. Make meals in small, portable portions

Our metabolism has to be revving for our bodies to burn fat, and one of the primary ways to do this along with exercise is to eat regularly throughout the day.

In addition, having easy to access portable nutrition options is a key strategy when we feel the urge or temptation to grab the easy, convenient fast food choice.

When meal prepping and planning, it is a key task to prep small portions in portable containers that can be used throughout the week. Whenever these options are readily available, we are putting ourselves in a position to be successful and achieve our health goals!