



March is National Nutrition Month, so to get you ready for a healthy food refresh, we're focusing this month on how to meal plan on a busy schedule. We spoke with Krista Lehde, a local and certified Nutrition and Wellness Consultant, to determine what myths keep us from meal planning and where to start when planning for and making quick, healthy meals.

Meal Planning Myths

1. Meal Planning is prohibitively expensive.

When you meal plan, you don't have to fork over hundreds of dollars weekly for multiple recipes with lots of ingredients. "Meal planning at its simplest can be a huge budget booster," Lehde says. By choosing meals that share ingredients, you cut down on food waste and the ingredients you need to buy, and by cooking in bulk, one meal prep can last for many meals, giving you the most bang for your buck.

2. I can't fit meal planning into my schedule.

When you add up all the time you spend prepping daily meals, picking meals up from a restaurant, or searching aimlessly in the grocery store for something that looks good, you likely spend a lot more time than you would meal planning. Krista averages about an hour for planning and creating a list, and 1-2 hours of actual prep time per week. "It's definitely a process that gets quicker with time, as you settle on some favorite recipes and become more familiar with cooking techniques."

Where Can You Start?

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the thought of planning your weekly meals, focus on the following:

1. **Be realistic.** Choose a recipe that fits your needs, time constraints, and taste buds. Krista recommends that, if time is an issue, "opt for a 4-ingredient casserole instead of a dish with over 20 ingredients." Also, focus on what you will actually want to eat. "If you choose meals that aren't personally appetizing, you're likely to pass them over and get something else anyway!"
2. **Choose daily themes.** Make your menu creation easier by assigning each day a theme. Krista often assigns Tuesday as Mexican night, Wednesday night as vegetarian night, and Friday night as pizza night. "It's easier to plan dinners when you don't have as many options to choose from."
3. **Embrace leftovers.** "Make double batches of recipes that you like—what you don't eat, you can always freeze for another week," Krista advises. Dinner leftovers can make a great lunch, and lunch leftovers can make a great dinner. And if you're not a traditional breakfast eater, you can always use dinner leftovers for a healthy breakfast too—as long as you're getting a nutritious start to your day, that's all that matters.
4. **Don't bite off more than you can chew.** "When you're meal planning, only choose one new recipe per week," Lehde says. "Any more than that, and you may be setting yourself up for failure."



Do you want to create a healthy meal plan for you and your family?

As part of your EAP benefits, you can meet with a nutritionist or holistic health coach to discuss healthy eating and meal planning. Call our main number to schedule an appointment.