



MEAL PLANNING *Mistakes*

From planning and prepping to storing and eating, the approach you take when it comes to planning your weekly meals is a key player in setting yourself up for success. The internet has many platforms attempting to educate you on how to step up your nutritional organization, but the most important thing is for you to successfully identify all the points where you can go wrong.

By helping you identify the common meal planning pitfalls that beginners fall into, we're here to help you ensure that you have a smart solution in place to avoid them.

1. Not giving yourself sufficient time for planning

Meal planning is going to take time. No matter how long you've been doing it, your meal planning is not going to happen in one evening. Meal planning involves nutrition planning, shopping, and preparation - not to mention the extra bits and pieces you should be considering along the way (more on this later).

What you really don't want to end up doing is rushing to get everything done under a time limit: this is a surefire way to make meal planning an overwhelming and stressful experience - probably not something you're going to stick with.

The Solution: Make sure you always give yourself plenty of time for your meal planning, especially as a beginner. Many people like to set aside their Sunday for meal planning. Giving yourself the day for shopping, preparation and cooking is a worthwhile investment in your health and productivity for the rest of the week.

2. Not picking the right recipes for your needs

Choosing the correct meals for your needs is a huge problem when it comes to meal planning successfully. There are many factors in play here and it's obviously difficult for you to guess exactly what you'll fancy for dinner in the future, so you have to play smart. Things to avoid when choosing recipes:

- Don't choose recipes that are likely to leave you unsatisfied, frustrated and *hungry!*
Be honest with yourself when you are doing your meal planning: are you really going to find yourself satisfied by your third night of plain chicken salad in a row? Make sure you plan out interesting meals and include a variety of different meal styles throughout the week - this is going to be key to stay on track.
- Don't choose recipes that require the same pot, pan, or cooking surface
Preparing food in advance is a big part of most meal planning routines and the faster you can get it done, the less of a burden it's going to feel. You're also more likely to stick to your plans in the long-term. A smart move is to choose recipes that do **not** require the same cooking equipment - this way you can multitask and have all the work done in a fraction of the time.
- Leaving the recipe that takes the longest for last
Our advice would be to get that big pot of casserole on the stove, or that whole chicken roasting in the oven at your first opportunity! Starting your meal prep session with these longer and more time-consuming recipes is always going to be the smart choice, cutting down your time in the kitchen by volumes.

- **Not thinking about NUTRITION!!**

If you're trying to master your meal planning, it's safe to say you have some reasoning behind it. Whatever this reasoning might be (weight loss, muscle gain etc.) you need to make sure you are effectively planning your meals to cater towards your goals. Do your research and count your macros, it's going to make the result much faster and more reliable.

- **Dressing salad ahead of time**

This one's slightly different, but still important - salad dressings, especially shop bought salad dressings, are an incredibly fast way to ruin all your hard work planning out healthy meals for the week. Store-bought salad dressings in particular can be packed with excessive sugar, low-quality fats and unnecessary calories. Also, no one likes soggy salad. Save adding your dressings until you are ready to eat your salads, and make sure to ration your portions effectively.



3. Not planning when you'll eat which meals

You probably wouldn't think of this particular point as problematic at all. You're likely to underestimate the temptation of all the easy-to-grab, ready-to-eat, prepared meals and snacks that are just waiting to be taken out of the fridge at your convenience.

By making sure you plan out when you're going to eat each of your prepared meals beforehand, you are much more likely to be sensible about this whole thing. Adding this extra layer of planning will stop you from eating two portions of the Bolognese pasta you cooked and leaving yourself with no choice but to buy an expensive meal on your lunch break tomorrow.

4. Being overly ambitious and unrealistic

As fantastic as it is to start your meal planning mission feeling inspired and enthusiastic about new recipes, flavors and foods, attempting new recipes for every day of the week, using exciting ingredients that you are unfamiliar with, is an excellent way to send yourself spiraling back to square one (and wasting a lot of money in the process). Do you actually know what you're going to do with that colorful, cute squash you found at the market, or is it going to end up in the bin once it starts to smell a bit funny and you finally admit defeat?

You should always start anything new by defining your goals and making sure they are realistic. Make a meal plan that is sustainable and well-suited to your abilities as a chef. Build most of your meal plan using recipes you know well. Tried and tested recipes are a wonderful place to start. This isn't to say that you should discount new recipes all together, incorporating something a bit different each week is a nice way of keeping yourself interested in sticking to your nutrition plan, but don't start with dauphinoise potatoes and beef wellington if you're more used to ramen and chicken strips.

5. Not stocking your pantry properly



Seasoned meal-planners know how crucial it is to keep their home well-stocked with all the essential sundries. The items you should have on hand are the things that you find yourself using on a weekly - if not a daily - basis. These include dried carbs (like pasta and rice), tinned goods (such as tomatoes, chickpeas and beans), basic herbs, spices and seasonings. Strategically stocking up on the basic ingredients also plays a key role in all those 'back pocket' recipes - don't feel like there's anything to eat? Even on days like this, possessing core ingredients such as eggs, pasta, stock and olive oil can all quickly lead to a one-pot wonder. The presence of the staple items in your cupboards at all times is most definitely going to make meal planning a bit easier.

6. Not scouting the kitchen for food that need to be used up

Meal planning isn't just for improving your physical health and wellbeing, but also the health of your bank account. Sensible meal planning and budgeting over a couple of months can lead to saving up volumes of money that you never realized you had access to before (hint: it's all being spent on takeaways and lunch-time coffee stops).

One key to making sure you are budgeting for your meal planning in the most effective manner possible is to take the time each week to scout out your cupboards and find out what ingredients you have hanging around from last week's shop. Taking advantage of leftovers and foods you already have is a simple step that both prevents food waste and save you a little extra cash.

7. Not writing down or saving your recipes

Organization is a key concept and skill when it comes to planning out your meals for the week, so writing down the recipes you are using on a regular basis makes it a lot easier for you to stay in control.

Jotting down any new recipes you come across that turned out to be successful is a quick and easy task and an excellent investment of your time. You don't have to worry about your notes being fancy - a piece of scrap paper on the fridge will work perfectly - but keeping a record of your recipes is going to really help you out when you sit down on Sunday to plan out your meals for the coming week.

8. Skipping upfront meal prep



Meal preparation and meal planning are concepts that work hand-in-hand. Skipping out on this step leaves you with more work to be done on a nightly basis. Leaving your food unprepared is almost as bad as not shopping at all when you come back home after a hard day I work, it's always going to be much easier to order in that take-out.

The solution here is *never* to discount meal prep. It is the step in the process that prevents you from starting from zero every night. If you set aside a chunk of your time (even if it's just 30mins to chop some vegetables) on a Sunday evening, you'll be investing in your overall meal planning success.

9. Attempting to keep track of all your cooking times in your head

When you are cooking multiple dishes, using multiple methods, for different time periods, trying to do so without some sort of electronic timer is asking for something to go wrong. You don't want to end up wasting time and money on burnt chicken, so think ahead and get the right tools for the job.

Many solutions exist for this problem. You could head out to your local retailers and grab yourself a traditional kitchen timer, or you could download a multi-timer app - there are loads of these for both iOS and Android. With these apps you can set a 20-minute clock on your curry on the stove as well as a 60-minute timer on baking your sweet potatoes.

10. Making too much

Keep it simple. If you cook too much; you're not going to eat it. This is perhaps **the** easiest way to waste your time, money and food. The best way to avoid this is learning by experience: if, last time you made the recipe, it ended up dramatically over-catering for you needs, take note and make the changes necessary. If it happens a second time, you need to do some serious soul-searching!

11. Not having enough containers available

Before you start your first week of meal planning, something to consider is whether or not you have adequate containers to store all the food you are about to make. Also, make sure these containers are safe for purpose - are you going to microwave your food?

Cooking equipment is another thing to take inventory of before you make a start. Are there enough baking dishes in the house? Is that one wooden spoon you bought when you moved in going to be good enough to hold up for your 4 saucepans? Are you **really** willing to double-dip?

Make sure you have the food storage space, too. You might have your food, your container and your plan but if you don't have anywhere to keep the meals you've made, it's all going to be for nothing. Check out how much free space you have in your freezer and be realistic about how far in advance you can prepare.

12. Not waiting for food too cool before putting it in the fridge (food hygiene practices)

If you have ever experienced food poisoning, I'm sure you're keen to avoid it in future. Most cases of food poisoning, even those that were attributed to food consumed in restaurants are caused by consumption of home-prepared foods.

Part of safe and effective meal prep is practicing proper food hygiene practices, so here are a couple of pointers to help you do so:

- Clean and Sanities

Good food hygiene isn't just about washing your hands before assembling salads. You should be washing your hands periodically while you are cooking (obviously).



Take a step back and think about your meal preparation process and take note of what potentially hazardous foods you are cooking with. Hazardous foods include: raw and cooked meats, eggs, vegetables, fruits, and cheese. Almost all produce has some form of exposure to salmonella bacteria (the bacteria that acts to cause your typical case of food poisoning and all the symptoms that come with it), so be sure to practice caution.

You can never be too careful. If you're preparing chicken to go in your salad, you need to thoroughly clean, rinse and sanitise your hands and workstation after handling the raw poultry.

- Organize

Staying organized helps you keep her sanity and ensure that you are preparing foods efficiently to prevent food borne illness from developing. Always try and keep a close eye on the order in which ingredients are getting used during your recipes process. For example, if you're making a yoghurt-based pasta sauce, but you still need to cook and chill the pasta, don't remove your yoghurt from the refrigerator until just before you are ready to use it.

- Cook food to the correct temperature

Head out and buy a kitchen thermometer, it's going to be important. Cooking of potentially hazardous foods to the right internal temperature is one of the best and most accurate ways of preventing bacteria from causing food poisoning.

A good place to reference these cooking temperature is to follow the guidelines found on the [Centre for Disease Control website](#).

- **Reheat and Re-eat**

Reheating food in the correct manner is crucial - there's a reason that most microwaves have a dedicated "re-heat" button. If you aren't safely reheating your prepared meals, you're taking a big risk. It's important that you are getting your food up to the recommended 165-degree internal temperature for safety. If food isn't being reheated (e.g. a chicken salad) then be sure to keep the food item cooled and stored at the proper temperature (under 41-degrees) and discard it if it has been in the "temperature danger zone" for longer than four hours. Simply put, if you don't have an ice pack for your lunch box, leave that food at home.

13. Not labelling everything

Something you might not think about that can become very important when you start trying to prepare your food in bulk. One of the most important tools you will come to have in your meal planning kit is a sharpie marker and a roll of masking tape. Nothing should even go in the freezer without first obtaining a mark-up.

Tear off some masking tape and label up. You want to be including today's date, and the contents of the container. This makes sure you're only ever keeping food for a suitable length of time and helps you along the way when you're trying to do those routine fridge-freezer clean outs.

14. Not having a back-up plan

Everyone has days when they get stuck late at work, miss their train, or just really don't fancy eating that same chili for the fourth night on-the-trot. The key to effective meal planning is to ensure that you don't end up picking up the phone or opening up your computer and settling on that same old Chinese takeaway because you don't have a plan B set up.

Making your back-up plan is as simple as remembering all those back-pocket recipes you have stored up. Those super simple recipes that you know by heart and come together outstandingly quickly. Omelets, pancakes, or even jarred pasta sauces. Your biggest investment in plan B is something that was mentioned at length earlier however: stocking up on the basics.

Meal planning isn't difficult, it just takes time and a lot of thought. By reaching the end of this report, you should have gained the know-how to make your life in the kitchen a bit calmer, and your new venture into meal planning a lot more successful. Every time you go through the weekly process of meal planning, you learn what does and does not work for you specifically. The entire process is customizable and you'll begin to learn where you can improve, what steps you can safely skip, what meals are best to prepare, when is best to eat what, and so much more. Like almost everything in life: practice makes perfect.

Wishing you yummy meal planning!

Jeanine