



Plan Your Menu For a Better Diet and Easier Life

It is great to get into the habit of planning your meals for a day or even a week in advance.

It is not always easy but listed below are several good reasons for menu planning.

Menu planning will:

- Save you time by only having to make one or two shopping trips a week.
- Save you money by cutting down on waste and impulse buys.
- Help you eat a balanced diet.
- Ensure you have all the ingredients to hand to cook a particular dish.
- Stop last minute buying of take-aways and processed ready meals. These are usually poor value for money and very high in fats and sugars.
- Save you thinking about what to cook every day or on the way home from work.
- Save time by cooking ahead or for the freezer.



How to plan

- Look at the “Eatwell Plate” in the “free stuff” section of the website and, try to make each meal/or day fit into this example.
- Have you got 5 portions of vegetables or fruit throughout the day? Aim for a variety for a good range of nutrients. Don't forget these can be tinned, dried, frozen, juiced and fresh. They also count if added to a dish, i.e. tinned tomatoes, mushrooms and chopped onion in a lasagne.
- Use vegetables, potatoes, pulses like lentils, or butter beans to bulk out expensive cuts of meat and mince and to increase your vegetable intake.
- If one meal of the day doesn't incorporate a food group then get that group into the next meal, look at the whole day's food and see if you have “got the balance right”!
- Be careful not to have too many of the same types of food at one meal or in one day, for example:
 - Eggs for breakfast and omelette for lunch or tea.
 - Sausage sandwich for lunch and then toad in the hole for tea.
 - Pasta salad for lunch and spaghetti bolognese for tea.
 - Cauliflower cheese for a main course with rice pudding for dessert.
 - Meat pie for a main course with fruit pie for dessert.



- Think and look at what's in season. Seasonal foods are usually cheaper than expensive imports and will also save on food miles too, e.g. fresh strawberries are available all year round, but the English strawberry season is mid-summer and that's when strawberries are at their best and cheapest.
- It's fine to indulge on short season foods like raspberries and other soft fruits.
- Avoid using highly processed foods too often.
- If you need to use a ready meal try to serve something non-processed with it like vegetables or potatoes.
- If you like to have puddings, make it a fruit-based one, preferably homemade.
- Don't forget that snacks are a good opportunity to increase your consumption of fruit and vegetables which are low calorie, low fat and no added sugars.

Store cupboard essentials

Tinned tomatoes

Tinned beans & pulses

Good quality tinned soup

Fruit in juice or frozen fruits

Pasta & spaghetti

Tinned vegetables

Herbs and spices

Lemons

Garlic

Rice