



Meal Planning and Shopping

Part of a Nutrition Education Series by the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program

Make meal planning easy

Meal planning is easier than most people think. The benefits of meal planning are:

- It saves money because you buy only what you need.
- It saves time. (No more frantic searches through the cabinets for food or waiting for food to thaw.)
- It saves your energy – a valuable resource!

Easy steps to meal planning

There are a few easy steps to make a meal plan:

- Determine how often you will shop and your budget.
- Know how many people will be eating at each meal, so you don't buy too much food.
- Include the types of food that you can get at the food pantry or purchase with Food Stamps in your meals.
- Plan for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.
- Next to each meal, write down the ingredients that you need to prepare it.
- Keep a grocery list in the kitchen where you can see it so as you run out of staples during the week you can put it on your list.

Tips for meal planning

Stay Flexible – Meal plans should be flexible so that you can switch meals around if you need to.

Make planning a habit – A meal plan won't help if you don't make one. Weekly meal planning only helps if it becomes a habit every time before you shop.

Recycle your menus—Save your weekly meal plans to use again.

Tips for grocery shopping

- Always watch for sales and specials.
- Don't shop when you're hungry or thirsty.
- Compare prices among grocery stores.
- Use coupons for foods you are planning on using anyway.
- Keep cabinets organized so you don't buy food you already have.
- Buy only what you have room to store.
- Stick to your list.
- Stick to your budget.



Saving money at the store

There are several ways to save money when shopping. Look through the weekly flyers to check for sales and specials. Many times you will be able to plan meals based on food that is on sale. Look at the menu that you have planned and see if any of the ingredients that you need are on sale. If so, then shop in the store where you can save the most money.

Also compare the unit price on the same product from different brands to determine the best size and

brand for your money. (Unit prices are the small labels on the bottom of the shelf in the grocery store.)

Coupons may also help save money. Clip coupons and attach the ones you are going to use to your grocery list. Do not buy an item or brand just because you have a coupon. Another brand may be cheaper or you may really not need that item.

Look at package labels to see how many servings are in each package to determine exactly how much food you will get from that item. For example, a can of tomatoes might have 4 servings. If you are feeding 5 people there may not be enough.

In most cases, the store brand or generic version is cheaper than a name brand. Store brands are just as nutritious and taste just as good as name brands.

Prepared foods cost more than unprepared foods. For example, grated cheese is more expensive than a wedge of cheese that you can grate yourself. Buying potatoes and cooking them yourself is usually cheaper than instant mashed potatoes. Instead of buying the individual packets of oatmeal, buy a large container of oatmeal and add some fruit to it yourself.

Watch the cash register carefully because you can accidentally be charged too much. Know how much items cost and make sure that sale items are rung up at the sale price.

For more food & nutrition information, contact your local extension office. For more information on Food Stamps, contact DSS at 1-800-768-5700.

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