

Meal Planning 101

A key to successful family mealtime is planning. Research shows that cooking at home is significantly more likely if you already know what you will have for dinner.

- 1** Set aside time each week for menu planning. The amount of time you need will decrease as you gain experience.
- 2** Ask your family for ideas of what they would like to eat during the week.
- 3** Plan your menu around food items you already have in the pantry.
- 4** Choose a variety of meals including family favorites, budget stretchers, and quick-fix meals.
- 5** Cook once, eat twice.
- 6** Plan to use your leftovers.
- 7** Picture the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) MyPlate as you plan each meal.
- 8** Have your local store ads available. Take advantage of those sales!
- 9** Create a thorough shopping list.
- 10** Keep it simple! Successful family meals don't have to be gourmet; they just have to be a time together.

QUICK TIPS

Tired of planning a menu every week?

Try planning a 2-4 week cycle menu. Choose meals for 2-4 weeks and then repeat once the cycle is over. Change cycle menus with the seasons to take advantage of local produce.

Bored of the same old meals?

Add some theme nights to your week. Taco Tuesdays, Breakfast for Dinner Thursdays, or Sandwich Saturdays are fun for the whole family. Let kids choose a theme and then make some table decorations for added entertainment.

