

## Planning meals saves time, energy and money

March is Nutrition Month, but really every month is nutrition month. I always look forward to March; it is the time of year that we get our first glimpse of spring. The days start to get a little longer and the wind is almost warm. It's also the time I begin to contemplate gardening and the delicious things I will plant this year in my attempt to grown my own vegetables.

My gardening dreams aside, I find this time of year very busy as I juggle the time demands of work, school, pets, swim lessons and family time. One of the best things I have done to save myself time, energy and money is plan weekly meals in advance. Ideally a monthly meal plan would be great, but even a week at a time can work wonders.

Here's how I have made meal planning work for me – maybe some of these ideas will work for you too.

The first and most important thing I do is brainstorm some meal ideas that I know my family will like. The brainstorming phase can be fun. I ask friends, family and co-workers for their favourite recipes. Once I have collected some great ideas, I go through them and see which ones will work. Sometimes I modify the recipes to suit our tastes, dietary preferences, and needs.

Then I look at the week's activities to see if there are any days that are busier than others. I find it helps to use a crock pot on those days or make larger meals on the weekend in order to reheat leftovers throughout the week. Another great time-saving tip I have discovered is to double up at least two of the recipe ideas each week, preferably those that are family favourites and will freeze well.

Once I have my top five to seven recipes, its time to write out a grocery list. I start by taking inventory and going through my cupboard, pantry and fridge to see if there are any items on the grocery list that I already have or may need more of. Once my list is complete, I chose a good time for shopping. I've learned that for me this means not shopping when hungry. Having a healthy snack before I enter the store helps keep me focused on my list and reduces temptation to buy other food.

Happy Shopping!

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