

Quick How to Meal Plan Guide

Welcome to my Meal Planning Guidebook.

You are on your way to a much greater victory my friend.

www.thefrugalfarmgirl.com

What's in this Guide

- How to get started with 10 Tips & Strategies
- List of Must Have Pantry Items
- Free App to Use that allows you to customize your shopping list

Congratulations. You are now on your way to increasing your income without getting a second job. Meal planning will give you margin in your budget, something we all need in every aspect of our lives.

The following are the first steps you need to consider when deciding that meal planning is a way you can feed your family for less.

Stop the scrambling for dinner and feeling discouraged because you are stressed and unprepared to cook. Everyone can cook a healthy affordable meal for the family. Yes you can.

Let's get started

FIGURE OUT YOUR GROCERY BUDGET

You can't begin to meal plan unless you know the amount of money you have to work with. Everyone can make a meal plan and have less stress of what to make but your bank account will quickly dwindle.

Like Dave Ramsey said you have to tell your money where to go, or else it will choose for you. [Here](#) are some different budget worksheets you can download to fit your needs and

style.

Quick Tips to Help Live Within in your budget

1. [Use these 6 Free Grocery Apps to save](#)
2. Use [Store Coupon Matchup Lists](#) to shop from
3. [Print Coupons](#) and Get Coupons in [Sunday Newspapers](#)
4. Follow a coupon blogs [freebie section](#)

SET ASIDE TIME

Plan for an hour or two where you can focus.

- First look at what you have in your freezer/fridge and take a mental inventory. Start with what proteins you currently have. This [article about how to make a grocery list](#) may benefit you if they idea of shopping from your pantry is brand new.
- If you do not have any proteins in your house grab three ads from your local grocery stores.
- Pick which store has the best price on a meat that is within your budget. Remember if you are craving steak and the \$7.99/lb. on sale takes up more than half the budget, gently put those cravings aside and go for the meat that is in the \$1/lb. range!

Once you have your protein selected I suggest to not pick more then two different proteins and do at least one meatless meal a week.

Ideas for meatless meals:

1. Substitute Beans for meat
2. Eggs
3. Tofu
4. Cauliflower (use for mashed potatoes, crusts etc.)
5. Homemade pizza
6. Pasta

HIT THE BOOKS

Grab out your cookbooks! My generation is leaning more towards digital of course which is great because you can access thousands of recipes for free. [Pinterest](#) is great for staying organized. Taste of Homes is one of my favorites to use for easy recipes.

- Search using the proteins you selected. [MyFridge Food](#) is a site where you can find recipes after checking the foods you currently have in your fridge.
- Start by making a meal menu for 5 days. Always use from your pantry first and the items on sale at the grocery store second.
- You can work your way up to 7 days a week. Even if five days sounds intimidating don't be afraid to start small. This varies depending on what your family's current lifestyle is.

For example: If you eat out 5 days a week and make dinner or even throw in a frozen pizza two nights a week it will be difficult to start cooking 5 days a week. You may find you have more leftovers which can be used later in the week for another meal.

Instead aim for cooking three nights a week. The success of meal planning is to make it a priority and start slow and fitting to your family's needs/schedules.

- I always start with my dinner meals. Breakfast stays basic around here- eggs, cereal, oatmeal or pancakes. For lunch it's usually sandwiches or leftovers. The dinner is the meal that can be our budget breaker if we do not plan accordingly.

BUY FRESH FRUITS & VEGGIES IN SEASON

Only buy fresh fruits or veggies that are in season. Are you craving strawberries, but they are \$6 for 8 oz.? In our house that will last 2 minutes. And for \$6?!

- In off season months I buy fruits and veggies frozen. If my kids are craving

strawberries I will take my frozen bag and use in smoothies.

- Canned veggies are always on sale during the winter months. Worried about the sodium? Rinse off in cold water or look for no salt, or low sodium cans.

KEEP THE SIDES SIMPLE

Don't get too crazy with your sides. Simply sautéing fresh veggies in EVOO (Extra Virgin Olive Oil) and salt and pepper is delicious.

- DO NOT be afraid of salt. Yes processed foods are loaded with it, but at home you are still using less than the Frozen TV dinner. Use sea salt if you are nervous about over salting. It's more forgiving.
- Don't think that you have to have a fruit, veggie, protein, and carbs, all in one meal. There are many meals that incorporate all the nutritional value without running yourself thin making 3 or more sides.
- If you only serve a protein and one vegetable fill in the rest of your family's nutritional needs during breakfast, lunch, and snack time!

SIMPLE AND AFFORDABLE

Aim for one new recipe a week if you have some go to recipes under your belt.

- If cooking meals is all brand new to you start with recipes where the food is familiar to you.
- Meal planning brings about emotions that cause excitement to try something new. I know I did this in the beginning and it lead to disappointment and stress. Remember that new recipes can be stressful especially when the kids are screaming at you.

Save your new recipes for a day you have help around the house or in case something takes longer than you anticipated

DISPLAY YOUR MENU

Now this doesn't mean you have to go out and spend money on something cute. You can print the menu included in this guide. Keep your menu visible for all family members. They will know what to expect and in case of an emergency and you can't start dinner on time have your spouse or older children start on the recipe.

I found a dry eraser board at Goodwill for \$2. You could use the plain chalkboards at crafts stores that are found in the dollar bins. If you must have something you can display that isn't on paper there are plenty of deals to do so for less than \$5. Just be sure your budget allows it ;)

KNOW YOUR PRICES & USE COUPONS

Use coupons and learn the price stock up points

- . It's important that you start to follow coupon deal blogs to see when you should stock up on items. They may not tell you this is a stock up price but when they are sharing deals with you they are usually a deal worth grabbing.
- At first get in the habit of recognizing when something is a steal to grab two. Same with meat if you see a deal don't hesitate to grab an extra pound or two meats can always be frozen.
- Ideally find a coupon matchup list for the grocery store you prefer to shop at.

Want to learn how to really use coupons?! Check out my [4 step Learning process here.](#)

I have a bunch of money saving articles on the blog to help as well!

BE RESOURCEFUL

When you first start meal planning you may forget an item or two, instead of running to the store try to make your own or substitute. Google is amazing for quickly finding substitutes for many baking items. If you don't like the term frugal or cheap replace it with resourceful!

The Master List of Pantry Items

When you have these items on hand you can make plenty of healthier affordable meals for your family.

Spices & Herbs

- Sea Salt
- Whole Black Peppercorns(grinding fresh pepper is the way to go)
- Basil
- Oregano
- Thyme
- Marjoram
- Tarragon
- Dill

- Bay Leaves
- Ground Mustard
- Chili Powder
- Nutmeg
- Parsley
- Cumin
- Fresh Garlic

Cooking & Baking

- Active dry yeast(This is Super affordable at BJ's- no coupons needed \$3.99 for 4 lbs.)
- All Purpose Flour (10 lb. bag \$4.99 at BJ's)
- Baking Powder (Aluminum Free 2 pack \$4.99 at BJ's)
- Baking Soda (13.5 lb bag \$4.99- Use for many other things. Put a small amount in container to keep fresh use rest for cleaning)
- Brown Sugar
- Granulated Sugar
- Cornstarch
- Cocoa Powder
- Real Maple Syrup
- Pure Vanilla Extract
- Raw Honey
- Whole Wheat Flour
- Cinnamon Powder
- Chicken & Beef Stock

Oils, Vinegars & Sauces

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Extra Virgin Coconut Oil
- Frank's Hot Sauce
- Soy Sauce
- Olive Oil
- Apple Cider Vinegar
- Balsamic Vinegar
- White Vinegar
- Red Wine Vinegar
- Worcestershire sauce

For the Fridge Door

- Dijion Mustard
- Ketchup
- Mayonnaise

Dairy & Eggs

- Butter Quarters
- Cheese
- Milk
- Yogurt (I like grabbing greek yogurt to use in place of sour cream in recipes.)

Vegetables

- Onions
- Celery
- Lettuce
- Potatoes

- Scallions
- Tomatoes

Canned Dry Goods

- Beans
- Tomatoes
- Tuna
- Pasta- variety of kinds
- Rice
- Chicken Stock/Bouillon Cubes
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I thought about including a printable shopping list, but really do you need to waste ink on something that has a detailed spot for all the items you are going to write down?

No. I didn't think so. We want to make the best use of our time. So I think the most modern and easiest way to get a deal and have a customizable shopping list right on your phone (or if you prefer you can do this and choose to print it out too) is to use the [Favado app](#).

This is a free app that has almost every grocery store you can think of on it. It gives you the sale prices of items weekly paired with any coupons/rebates available for the item. This is saving you time and money. [Check it out](#)- you will be happy you did!

Let me leave you with these quotes;

“Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.” William Penn
“If you want to make Good Use of your Time, you’ve got to know what’s
IMPORTANT and then give it all you’ve got.’ lee Iacocca

Many Blessings to you,

Tasia

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