

New Year Food Savings

Each year, millions of people make New Year Resolutions to save money and eat more at home, but on average, those resolutions only last for the first quarter of the year, usually ending within three months. There are many reasons resolutions fail, but the main ones are we are thinking too big, do not consider the reason for making the resolution, and are not ready to change. So, how do you change this? When saving money and eating more at home, start small, meal plan a few days a week and build up, plan the meals around what is on sale, look in your cabinets before you start to meal plan, and see what you already have.

Although it will require some intentional thought upfront, meal planning can prevent last-minute food splurges that break your food budget. Meal planning is simply planning a week's worth of meals so you do not have to ask what's for dinner each day. Don't over plan! Meal planning is not a giant binder with a month's worth of meals; it's starting small on a Friday and practicing over the weekend: Friday plan, Saturday shop, and Sunday meal prep.

The best way to save on groceries, many experts say, is by meal planning. There are five questions to consider when starting a meal plan: 1. How many meals, 2. What type of meals, 3. What does my time look like for the week, 4. How will I meal plan (calendar on the fridge, planner, etc.), and 5. Do I have a plan B?

If you are new to meal planning, start small and only plan dinners for the week. If you have been planning meals for a while, you can add breakfasts and lunches. Look at what your household has going on that week (meetings, sports, school events, etc.), or if you have a weekly tradition such as Friday night pizza, you will not need to plan a meal for that night. You might want to include a night for leftovers, eating out, or takeout.

Planning what types of meals you want is important so you are not stressed. Know what your family likes to eat or get them involved for ideas. Next, add foods served with that main dish. It is also important to make sure meals are balanced when planning. A balanced meal includes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein, and dairy foods. Create a meal template to help you plan.

When thinking of meals, think about what activities you have for the week. Will you need to get a kid to sports practice or do you have a late meeting? Having those things in mind will help you decide how much time you have to devote to the meal for that night. Look ahead for extra-busy days and plan something quick for those days.

Keeping the planned meals in the same place helps to keep your mind clear. A whiteboard hung in the kitchen, or even a sheet of paper, can help keep meals straight so you know what you are making that day.

It does not matter how experienced you are in planning meals; sometimes, things go wrong, and you need a backup. Add a plan B or extra meal to your list and shop for it. This can be something simple like omelets.

Look at each meal's recipes and list the ingredients you need to prepare them. Do this for each meal to create a shopping list. Creating a shopping list in advance saves time and money, helps you know what items to purchase in large quantities, and prevents impulse buying.

After the meals are planned out, it is time to shop. Look through local sales ads to see which has the best prices.

Shop your kitchen first. Check your cabinets, refrigerator, and freezer for what you have available.

Buy only the items you need for that week. Make smart substitutions for less expensive items. Purchase in-season produce.

The dollars can add up when feeding the family for a month, but healthy meals don't have to break the bank! By planning ahead and buying ingredients for three or four meals at once, you don't overspend on groceries, and you don't waste your money.