

WELLNESS TIPS

FOOD PREP WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TIME

This week's Wellness Tips presents ideas for planning and preparing meals when time is limited. These ideas can save time on cooking throughout the week while creating meals.

The goal is to keep things simple, using fewer ingredients and sticking to the basics. Save the more elaborate meals for occasions when you have more time. You can make satisfying and enjoyable meals with simple recipes. Your repertoire should include some no-recipe meals such as yogurt with granola or fruit, PBJ sandwiches, veggies and naan bread with hummus, hard boiled eggs with fruit or vegetables or toast.

PLANNING This takes some time up front but will ease time commitments later.

- Begin by compiling a list of menus and recipes for meals that you like and do not require a lot of time.
- Keep it simple. There are sites and cookbooks that feature recipes with 3-5 ingredients. And you might not need a lot of variety for some meals, such as breakfast or lunch.
- From your list, develop a meal plan for the coming week or longer (Monday – Friday time blocks, weekends open). Consider creating a weekly or monthly meal rotation. Include breakfast, lunch, and snacks.
- Consider ordering groceries on-line with pick-up or delivery. If feasible when you are shopping in person, choose a day or time when the store will be less busy.
- Have containers for freezing and storing your meals.
- Keep a running grocery list on the fridge or have an app that you can add to. This helps avoid unexpected trips to the store.
- Have frozen or canned foods on hand. Artichokes and roasted red peppers can perk up a salad. Read the labels to make healthy choices.

PREPPING Limit the number of times you prep meals. Aim for once a week. Prepping may include getting ingredients ready or cooking the entire dish.

- Clean, chop, premeasure, cook any food that you can so it is ready to mix, eat, or cook. To prep a smoothie, combine sliced fruit and non-liquid ingredients and freeze in Ziplock bags. It is ready to combine with liquids. Having vegetables cleaned and chopped saves a lot of time later.
- Prepped foods can often be refrigerated for 3-4 days.
- If you cook or prep too much, many foods can be frozen.
- Try to limit the number of items you cook but choose foods that you can use in several ways.

- Buffet meal prep: Cook in batches but do not necessarily combine the foods so that you can use in different combinations during the week. For example, prepare two proteins, rice, roast some vegetables, and have some sauce or dressing and you can create a bowl, salad, wrap, sandwich, or a side dish.
- You might consider it worth the money to buy prepped food from the grocery store.

Some people create “dump meals”, putting ingredients into a Ziplock bag, refrigerate or freeze, then put it into a crockpot to cook during the day.

Have you tried making meals in a mug such as quiche or a dessert in your microwave?

Don't like cooking? Meet up with friends for a social food prep session and then divide the food between you.

These meal planning and prep strategies are designed to save time during the week while also providing healthy and enjoyable meals. And they can contribute to saving money and moderating impulse food buying.

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Wellismore.com. “The Easier Way to Meal Prep on a Busy Schedule.”

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Check the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Feel free to contact the MSCC to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment for questions and concerns.

Stay safe and stay well!

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