

Meal Planning 101

The first thing I learned about meal planning was always to have a plan. This is the easy part. You can pick any recipes – mine, yours, your great Aunt Sally’s – it doesn’t matter. Pick enough meals to fill the week. When starting out, we also picked a couple of “easy meals” that could be kept in the fridge in case we didn’t have enough time to cook what we planned, or we forgot to lay something out. Easy meals can be something like frozen pizza or chicken patties. Now that we have been meal planning for several years, we never do these now, but they were forgivable and necessary when we had kids living at home.

Part of having a plan is writing it down. Even if you just make a list on a sheet of scrap paper and stick it on the fridge, if you write it down, you will be doing yourself a huge favor. We write ours in a pocket-sized journal that slips easily into my purse when I go shopping so we know what we need to purchase. This is a money-saving technique as the list prevents picking up extra items.

When picking meals, it helps to consider what you have (supplies and appliances), what you need, and what you are doing throughout the week. For example, if you choose to make Italian Sausage Pasta, it is easy to make Peppercorn Chicken in the same week since both recipes call for whipping cream. If you do not have a large freezer, it may be difficult to store lots of meats, so it is important to plan your space accordingly. You may need to repackage in freezer bags, remove items from boxes, and play a few games of freezer Tetris. If a recipe calls for an Air Fryer, it can be pan fried. InstaPot recipes can be done on the stovetop or altered into a CrockPot recipe if necessary, but planning is necessary.

Making time for shopping is also part of the plan. Think about the stores you need to go to and the layouts. If you need to label items based on where you plan to purchase them, do it. Use the Scan and Go app for Sam’s Club, order items from Kroger to make it easy to pick up, and buy items from local growers when you can. Grocery shopping is not always fun, but there are ways to make it bearable. We tend to do our shopping on Friday evenings to avoid the large crowds, and those are the days we usually reserve for a quick bite of fast food. Stores are not nearly as crowded as they are on Saturdays or Sundays, and we try to plan all of our errands for the same time.