



Meal Planning

Information for Parents

Planning nutritious meals is easy! Just follow these simple tips.

Plan for 3-4 Servings per Day of Dairy: Eating three to four servings a day of dairy foods, depending on caloric needs and dairy choicesⁱ, such as low-fat or non-fat milk, yogurt and cheese, is a deliciously easy way for families to meet their daily calcium needs. Research shows that Americans who consume more dairy foods have better overall diets, consume more nutrients and see improved bone health.ⁱⁱ

Let the MyPlate Model be Your Guide: Hot or cold, convenience or scratch, everyday foods or new and exotic — use [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov) for planning nutritious meals. Include foods from all the food groups, and choose a variety of foods from each group. A variety of foods prevents boredom and is the best way to ensure your family gets the 40+ nutrients they need each day.

Plan Ahead: It avoids the question, "What's for dinner tonight?" and increases the likelihood that meals are nutritious. There's no magic formula. Choose what works best for you — one day, a few days or a week at a time. The key is knowing your family's schedule and including foods that that can be prepared in the time available. Use your plan for your grocery list.

Think Convenience: Take advantage of the variety of healthful and convenient foods available. For busy nights, plan to pick up a pizza, roast chicken or entree on the way home. Prepare a salad, cut up some fruit, cook some pasta or slice some bread, pour some milk and dinner is served!

Keep a Well-Stocked Pantry and Fridge: Put nutritious meals together in a hurry when there's a last-minute schedule change or you didn't get around to planning.

Plan Family Meals and Meals for the Family: Schedule family meals several times during the week. Children who eat with their families tend to have healthier eating patterns. Include your favorites, as well as your children's. Too often it's easiest to only plan meals around what kids like. Remember that children need to grow to join the family and develop a taste for new foods.

Save Time (and Money) by Using Leftovers: Many foods taste just as good, or better, the second time around. So be sure leftovers are on the menu. It cuts time in the kitchen and can stretch your food dollar.

ⁱ National Institutes of Health: Office of Dietary Supplements. [Calcium: Dietary Supplement Fact Sheet](https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-HealthProfessional/#h3). November 2013. Accessed at: <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-HealthProfessional/#h3>. February 20, 2018.

ⁱⁱ National Dairy Council. [Science Supporting Dairy's Role in Bone Health](https://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/content/2015/the-science-supporting-dairys-role-in-bone-health). 2015. National Dairy Council. Accessed at <https://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/content/2015/the-science-supporting-dairys-role-in-bone-health>. February 20, 2018.