



Stress-free Meal Planning

Simple, smart, and sustainable tips for planning meals, grocery shopping, and enjoying food with your family

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Do you struggle with menu planning, grocery shopping, and food prep? Me, too.

There's hope! With a few simple steps, you can design a sustainable meal plan, wrap your mind around your grocery list, and provide food for your family.

What's inside:

- Three habits that will change your mind about food planning
- Five helpful tips for stress-free meal planning
- My one-page Spring/ Summer plan and one-page Fall/ Winter food plan
You'll notice that we are a kid-friendly, gluten-free, protein-loving family. It helps that we live in the country where we can produce or purchase inexpensive and healthy farm-raised eggs, milk, and beef. These meal plans are just examples. Design your meal plan(s) to reflect your preferences and needs. Aim for simple, delicious, and stress-free!
- My two-page grocery list
This, too, is just meant to be an example that inspires you to write your own grocery list. Once you know the recipes that you'll be using, you can record all of the ingredients that you will need from week to week. Ask yourself, "What do I need for the food I'm going to make this week?"
- Five of our family's favorite, simple, gluten free recipes
- A list of our family's favorite gluten-free products

Three habits that will change your mind about meal planning

You need to know that food is not my forte.

For years, it has felt like an up-hill battle.

In our family, it works *logistically* for me to take responsibility for menu planning, grocery shopping, and food preparation, but it isn't my strength or my interest. Everything about it exhausts me: the budgeting, the coupons, the food allergies, the health ideals, the alluring recipe online, the *time* it takes! For years, it took me *hours* to figure out what we were going to eat from day to day, week to week. I'd sit with a pile of cookbooks and a stack of grocery store fliers and panic. It was the worst part of my work at home and I knew it needed to change.

I have good news! Things got better for me and they can get better for you, too.

Here's how:

1. Ask God for "joy in food".

I had complained about food one too many times when my friend Steph generously asked, "Have you ever asked God to give you joy in food?" I hadn't.

So, I began to ask for "joy in food".

When I needed to make lunch for my hungry kids, I'd take a deep breath and ask God, "Please give me joy in food." When I had to plan my grocery list, I'd ask, "Please give me joy in food." Over and over again, I'd ask.

Over time, God has been granting my request: I can see that I am growing in this area, enjoying the process of providing food for my family.

2. Read foodie books.

One of the reasons that food stressed me out is because I didn't see its beautiful purpose in life. I needed a reason - a *why* - in order to love it and work hard at it. Foodie books helped me to see the beauty of food and its noble place in the home and community.

I need to spend time with authors who tell the stories of how food intersects with their lives, how they've been *formed by* food. For example, my heart melted when Molly Wizenburg wrote, "when my dad was in the hospital, I couldn't sleep, so I stewed some left-over dates in a little pot. I drizzled on some honey and sat in the dark kitchen eating them, one by one." Now *that* I can get into. A beautiful, memorable moment with just "dates and honey" on the grocery list? Yes, please. Spontaneous, rule-breaking, emotion-driven creativity in the *kitchen*? Yes, please. Love? Yes, please.

[*Bread & Wine*](#) was my first foodie book. Shauna Niequist tricked me into reading a book about food by making me think it was a book about God, which it was. But it's about God *and* food and helped me to see the connection between the two. After that, I read five foodie books in a row. I just kept borrowing the next book on the library shelf. I remember snuggling up with Molly Wizenburg's [*A Homemade Life*](#), and Ruth Reichl's [*Tender at the Bone*](#).

3. Listen to the meal-planning experts.

I've learned so much from resources like [*Cut Your Grocery Bill in Half with America's Cheapest Family*](#), *From Freezer to Table* by Polly Conner & Rachel Tiemeyer, and *The Life-Giving Table* by Sally Clarkson. I won't overwhelm you with links to *all* of the books and resources I studied over the years, but instead I'll share five of the tips that actually worked for me over time.

Five Tried-and-True Tips from the Experts (I'm not an expert)

1. Choose a permanent weekly shopping day/ time.

This will tether your entire plan. You'll be able to plan your weekly meals based on the freshness of the food. Plan to eat the fresh foods first. Save the sturdy shelf-stable foods for later in the week. With a "shopping day," you'll *know* that you're going to have food in your pantry and fridge. This is a solid step toward getting a meal on the table. 😊

I order my groceries online at home and pick them up when I'm in town for my daughter's violin lesson. It's always the same day and the same time. Most online ordering sites provide a "Past Purchases" or "Favorites" tab. I usually open this first tab first and quickly re-order our go-to groceries. Grocery pick-up has been a time, money, and sanity saver for me!

2. Do one large order at the beginning of the month, followed by smaller orders throughout the rest of the month.

This has been a game-changer for me. I buy most of what we'll need for the entire month in the first order of every month. Anything that is shelf-stable or freezer-friendly goes in the cart. Then, the rest of the month's orders are smaller, focusing on fresh produce and dairy. This makes the most of my time and energy when I'm meal-planning.

3. Choose a couple of sustainable ideals and let the others go.

When it comes to food, there are so many ideals! This is what can make meal-planning so stressful. We can't do it all: we can't save money, eat organically, eat locally, avoid all of the allergens, splurge on fun foods, eat gourmet, save time, and eat on the go. Let's choose a couple of our favorite (or necessary) ideals and let the rest go. For example, I choose the ideal of "on sale". If I can select a brand of tomato sauce that is cheaper than the others, I will. At the same time, I choose to let go of the ideal of "coupon clipping" because coupons overwhelm me and, for the time they require, aren't worth the savings to me.

Which ideals are you going to choose to embrace? Which ones are you going to let go?

4. Plan a seasonal menu with repeatable recipes.

Choose simple meals that everyone likes and wouldn't mind eating regularly. This includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, desserts, and special meals.

Try making the same meals week after week. I repeated the same recipes over and over again for two years. This helped me to master some basic dishes like stir-fry, baked salmon, and pulled pork. It gave me the margin I needed in order to master basic skills like grocery shopping, stocking a pantry, food prep, cooking, and clean-up. Making the same meals week after week was a gift I gave myself as I learned how to provide food for my family. Now that I understand some of the basics, I add more variety to our menu.

Billions of people all over the world repeat the same meals over and over again, week after week. I used to feel like I needed to try new recipes every week, but the constant “newness” ultimately stressed me out, filled my pantry with partially-used ingredients, and kept me from mastering the skills I needed to succeed. So, I joined the throngs of people who make the same thing regularly. I’ll never regret it!

Once you have your meal plan outlined, print it on a single-side page, attach it to the fridge, and commit to keeping that plan.

5. Print a 1- or 2-page grocery list of items that you buy regularly.

This goes on the fridge next to your Meal Plan. Put it in a plastic page-protector and use an erasable marker to make notes on it each week. Through the week, highlight or circle each item that you need to buy. Jot any extra items in the margin. Refer to this list with you when you shop and stick to the list.

With these five habits in place, you’ll know what’s for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Grocery shopping will be a snap and you’ll actually use the food that you’ve purchased. You’ll enjoy your meals with the people you love and you’ll breathe a big sigh of relief.

If that's not one big slice of "joy in food," I don't know what is.

SPRING/ SUMMER MEAL PLAN

BREAKFAST: SMOOTHIES

Sunday: Omelets and bacon

Monday: Yogurt w/ granola

Tuesday: Oatmeal w/ Craisins

Wednesday: English muffins w/ jam and cream cheese

Thursday: Eggs, seasonal fruit

Friday: Oatmeal w/ Craisins

Saturday: Waffles or pancakes

LUNCH: WATER

Sunday: Fruit salad, muffins

Monday: Tuna fish, Gluten Free Chebe Rolls, Melon

Tuesday: Chicken salad, veggies

Wednesday: Make Your Own Sandwiches, seasonal fruit

Thursday: Family Bento Box (veggies, cubed cheese/ meat, nuts)

Friday: PB& J, veggies

Saturday: Leftovers

DINNER: MILK

Sunday: Stir-fry with rice noodles

Monday: Rotisserie chicken, seasonal veggies, quinoa

Tuesday: Fish, rice, seasonal veggies

Wednesday: Hearty Salad (Cobb, Southwest, Mandarin, Philly) and bread

Thursday: Something Grilled (veggies, hamburgers, chicken wings, kielbasa, etc.)

Friday: Pizza, veggies, special dessert

Saturday: Baked Potato Bar

DESSERTS: roasted peaches and cream, Rice Krispie treats, dirt cups, ice cream pie, frozen blueberries, berries, cookies, ice cream

FALL/WINTER MEAL PLAN

BREAKFAST: SMOOTHIES

Sunday: Omelets and bacon

Monday: Scrambled eggs on buttered toast, seasonal fruit

Tuesday: Oatmeal & Craisins

Wednesday: Sunny-side up eggs, seasonal fruit

Thursday: Steel-cut oats

Friday: Egg Mash w/ avocados, black beans, salsa, etc.

Saturday: Waffles or pancakes

LUNCH: WATER

Sunday: French toast w/ berries

Monday: PB & J, apples, pretzels

Tuesday: Hardboiled Egg, bread, melon

Wednesday: Tuna fish Salad w/ crackers and veggies

Thursday: Baked broccoli and hot dogs

Friday: Instant Pot Rice Bowls w/ black beans and veggies

Saturday: Leftovers

DINNER: MILK

WEEK ONE OPTIONS:

Sunday: Baked Potato Bar

Monday: Rotisserie chicken, sweet potatoes, green beans

Tuesday: Fish, quinoa, broccoli

Wednesday: Hearty Salad w/ bread

Thursday: Rice bowl w/ veggies and bacon

Friday: Pizza, veggies, special dessert

Saturday: Hearty Soup and Gluten Free Rolls

WEEK TWO OPTIONS:

Sunday: Sausage, Brussel sprouts, sweet potatoes

Monday: Chicken Terriyaki, rice, veggies

Tuesday: Black beans and rice w/ cornbread

Wednesday: Kielbasa, broccoli, red potatoes

Thursday: Hearty Salad w/ bread

Friday: Pizza, veggies, special dessert

Saturday: Hearty Soup and sandwiches

DESSERTS: cobblers, chocolate-coconut treats, chocolate mousse, vanilla custard, roasted almonds, cookies, ice cream, popcorn, rice cakes and Nutella, apples and PB

Canned:

Peanut Butter

Almond Butter

Jelly/ Jam

Salsa

Soup/ Broth

Diced Tomatoes

Tomato Sauce/ Paste

Pasta/ Pizza Sauce

Baking:

Nuts:

Seeds:

Dried fruit:

Chocolate chips:

Raisins

Craisins

Sugar

Flour

Spices:

Salt

Baking Powder

Baking Soda

Condiments:

Mayo

Ketchup

Mustard

Lemon Juice

Lime Juice

BBQ

Dry Goods:

Oatmeal

Cereal:

Rice Cakes

Maple Syrup

Honey

Vinegar: white, apple cider

Oil: vegetable, olive, coconut

Pasta

Rice

Quinoa

Coffee

Breads:

Baguette

Sandwich bread

Rolls

Bagels

English Muffins

Frozen:

Veggies:

French Fries, Hashbrowns, Tots

Berries

Ice Cream

Dairy:

Eggs

Milk

Cream Cheese

Sour Cream

Whipping Cream

Butter

American Cheese

Block Cheese:

Yogurt

Meat:

Sausage

Bacon

Fish

Chicken

Pork

Beef

Lunch Meat:

Produce:

Lemons

Bananas

Apples

Melon

Berries

Sweet Potatoes

Potatoes

Avocados

Carrots

Broccoli

Cauliflower

Sugar Snap Peas

Spinach

Romaine

Tomatoes:

Cucumbers

Peppers

Green Beans

Garlic

Onion

Ginger

Guacamole

Veggie Dip

One more important tip...

Candles in the winter,
a picnic table in the summer,
and good conversation year-round
will transform the simplest food into a
meal that nourishes the people around
your table.

Gluten Free Blueberry Muffins

Author: Jeanine Friesen

Serves: 12

From America's Test Kitchen "How Can it Be Gluten Free Cookbook"

Ingredients

- 11 ounces (1 3/4 cups plus 2/3 cup ATK Gluten Free Flour Blend) *see below
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon xanthan gum
- 5 1/4 ounces (3/4 cup) granulated sugar
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 1/2 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 7 1/2 ounces (1 1/2 cups) blueberries
- 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar

Instructions

1. Whisk flour blend, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and xanthan gum together in large bowl. In separate bowl, whisk granulated sugar, melted butter, yogurt, eggs, and vanilla together until well combined. Using rubber spatula, stir egg mixture into flour mixture until thoroughly combined and no lumps remain, about 1 minute. Gently fold in blueberries until evenly distributed (batter will be thick and stiff). Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let batter rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Spray 12-cup muffin tin with vegetable oil spray. Using ice cream scoop or large spoon, portion batter evenly into prepared muffin tin. Sprinkle turbinado sugar over top. Bake until muffins are golden and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 16-20 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.
3. Let muffins cool in muffin tin on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove muffins from tin and let cool for 10 minutes before serving. (Muffins are best eaten warm on day they are made, but they can be cooled, then immediately transferred to zipper-lock bag and stored at room temperature for up to 1 day. To serve, warm in 300-degree oven for 10 minutes. Muffins can also be wrapped individually in plastic wrap, transferred to zipper-lock bag, and frozen for up to 3 weeks. to serve, remove plastic and microwave muffin for 20-30 seconds, then warm in 350-degree oven for 10 minutes.)

Gluten free Granola Bars

This recipe has been passed amongst friends in our community. My friend Renee sent it to me; she got it from her friend Erin, and I don't know where it came from before that. Well-loved recipes are the best.

2 cups oats

½ cup brown sugar

½ cup flax meal

1 cup flour (I use a gluten free all-purpose mix and it works well)

¾ tsp. cinnamon

½ tsp. salt

½ cup raisins

½ cup chocolate chips

½ cup honey

1 egg, beaten

½ cup vegetable oil

2 tsp. vanilla

In a large bowl, mix together the oats, brown sugar, flax meal, flour, cinnamon, salt, raisins, and chocolate chips. Make a well in the center, and pour in the honey, egg, oil, and vanilla. Mix well using your hands. Press the mixture evenly into a greased 9x13 inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes, or until the bars begin to turn golden at the edges.

Mandarin Salad

This is a go-to salad that I copied from my mother-in-law's handwritten cookbook way back in my first year of marriage.

Salad: Toss together in a large bowl:

Iceberg lettuce

Romaine lettuce

1 C. (11 ounce) Mandarin orange segments, drained

2 med. Stalks celery, chopped

2 green onions, sliced

Sugar-Toasted Almonds:

¼ C. sliced almonds

1 T + 1 t. sugar

Cook almonds & sugar over low heat in 1-quart saucepan, stirring constantly, until sugar is melted and almonds are cooked/ coated. Break apart.

Dressing:

¼ C. vegetable oil

2 T. sugar

½ t. salt

2 T. white vinegar

1 T. chpd. Parsley

dash of pepper

Shake all ingredients in a tightly covered container.

Drizzle dressing on the salad, toss. Sprinkle almonds on top.

Roasted Sweet Potato Bites

As you can see from my menu plan, I love to roast vegetables. Now that I know the 3 or 4 power-packed-vegetables that my family loves, I roast sweet potatoes, broccoli, and cauliflower every week. Recently, Sweet Potato Bites are our favorite.

Peel and cube 4 sweet potatoes.

Toss with coconut oil, garlic powder, and salt.

Roast on 425 degrees for 30-35 minutes.

Butter & Basil Salmon

This is a special-occasion recipe that I keep on hand. I copied this one from my mother's handwritten cookbook. She cooks the *best* salmon, pairing it with a sweet potatoes and spinach.

4 fresh salmon filets

3 T. butter, softened

1 T. snipped fresh basil

1 t. dried basil

1 T. snipped fresh parsley

2 t. lemon juice

Rinse and dry fish. In a small bowl, combine other ingredients. Place fish, skin-side down, on a greased, unheated broiler pan. Brush one side with sauce. Broil 5 minutes, 4 inches from the heat. Turn filets over. Brush with sauce again. Broil for 3-7 minutes more.

Our Favorite Gluten-Free Products

All-purpose flour mix: Walmart's Great Value brand

Rolls: Chebe rolls are a delicious addition to soup, tuna fish salad, or chicken salad. They're also delicious with a smear of Nutella, of course!

Baguettes: Against the Grain

Pizza: Against the Grain is our favorite frozen pizza. Chebe pizza crust mix is our favorite flour for homemade pizza crust.

Cookies: Walmart's vanilla sandwich cookies.

Baked goods mixes (cookies, brownies, white cake, etc.): Pillsbury

Bread crumbs: Panko

Pretzels: Snyder's (our recent favorite are the thicker pretzel rods)

Prepared cupcakes: Trader Joe's gluten free mini-cupcakes

Pasta: In my opinion, it's hard to match regular pasta, but Barilla comes close. Also, you can quickly cook up Thai Kitchen Stir-fry rice noodles.

Waffles and pancakes: Trader Joe's gf flour mixes and frozen gf waffles are good, too. We also like Pamella's and Bisquick Gluten Free Pancake Mixes.

Cornbread: Trader Joe's mix is pretty good

Sandwich bread: Walmart's Sam's Choice brand is good. So is Canyon Bakehouse.

English muffins: Glutino English muffins have a wonderful texture and are delicious!

Donuts: Katz Gluten free Donuts are delicious! We prefer the glazed donuts.