

Make a Plan for Meals

The Reid household will be trying some new recipes soon. Like you, I currently have more time at home and I am trying to be more intentional about how and when I shop.

The first step is to have a meal plan. Planning a week's worth of meals isn't always easy. Here are few ideas to get you started:

- 1) Make a list of your favorite foods and classify if they are main dishes, sides or desserts. What foods typically go together?
- 2) Add a "star" to any items that can be "planned overs" - for instance: roasted chicken enjoyed as a sandwich on a second day and in chicken salad on a 3rd day.
- 3) Consider listing items in categories such as cooking method: slow cooker, grill, oven; or time involvement: heat and eat, low preparation, medium preparation, etc.

When I had small children and lived 20 minutes away from the grocery store, I had to have a plan. Before going to the store, I planned a week of meals on one side of my shopping list. On the other side, I created a list of our commonly used items (arranged by aisle). During the week, I could circle items I would need to purchase. (It was great excuse when the little Reid's would ask, "Can we get 'xyz'?" My reply was always "Sorry, it is not on the list.")

I still use a version of that shopping list today but have recently added more space to include meal plans for lunch and dinner. This list is posted on the refrigerator. We're now using a second list to highlight leftover options or quick self-serve meal ideas.

Here are more tips for planning meals from Sandy Procter, a nutrition specialist with K-State Research and Extension:

- **Buy items in bulk.** Instead of buying grab-and-go breakfast bars, buy a box of bulk oatmeal instead. You can provide a lot of servings at once, and it's often less expensive.
- **Start with the basics,** such as sugar, flour or other items that help you make food from scratch. "Quick meals are maybe not as important right now as much as having enough variety on hand to make flexibility a key part of menu planning," Procter said.
- **Buy shelf-stable foods.** Fresh produce is great, but to avoid multiple trips to the store during the week, be sure to buy canned goods too. "Foods that are in cans or frozen are packed at their peak of nutritional value, so we know that those are healthy foods," Procter said. "Use the fresh items first, then incorporate those that will keep longer."
- **Include kids in meal planning.** "They will probably have some good ideas, and there are lessons that can be shared, too," Procter said. It's one of those times that we will think back on and you'll appreciate having the time to hang out with the kids and teaching them to cook."

Cooking, baking and kitchen clean-up can be family activities that are welcoming and reassuring. Planning meals will also help consumers use common sense and avoid the temptation to hoard goods: "Don't purposely clear out a shelf in the grocery store of something you need," Procter said. "If there are six on the shelf, and you need just one or two, don't take all six. Leave some there for the next guy."

“Take what you need, use it, plan well, incorporate everything you have into those menus and be smart about using all of our resources now.”

Source: Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension News Services; Sandy Procter, K-State Research and Extension

K-State Research and Extension — all in-person events have been canceled through May 16

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