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What are you having for dinner tonight? No idea? For many the dinnertime decision ends with popping a pizza in the oven, microwaving something quick or going to a drive thru. Stop making nutrition decisions in the moment and set yourself up for success by making healthy meals your default decision by using meal planning.

For as little as four hours or less each week, you can plan, shop, and prep healthy meals. Cooking a quick, healthy meal after a long day on the job can become stress-free if you plan your meals ahead of time. Adding in a few days’ worth of meal prep, like chopping and portioning out ingredients, for a few meals each week can make your dinnertime routine easy, fast and enjoyable. Meal planning and shopping for the work week will also save you time and money in the long run.

Preparing healthy meals

1: Research new and old favorite recipes to make. Look for comfort food makeovers and healthy versions of your favorite meals.

2: Mark meal ideas on a calendar for four meals plus one day of leftovers to make it through the work week.

3: Write out a grocery list for your meal plan and any other necessities for the week.

4: Grocery shop and prepare the first three days of your meal plan after you get home from the grocery store. This means chopping vegetables, batch cooking whole grains, preparing side dishes or a sauce.

5: Each weeknight after you have eaten your meal, glance at your plan for the next day. Read your recipe, defrost any frozen items, or quickly prepare raw ingredients that you may need for the next day.

Discussion questions

1. Have you been successful in the past at cooking healthy meals on a regular basis? Why or why not?

2. Why do you want to prepare healthy meals?

3. What recipes in the cookbook look the most interesting to you?

4. What are your next steps when it comes to meal planning and preparing healthy meals?
Support ear health and prevent hearing loss

One way to support your ear health is to always remember to wear protective devices when exposed to loud noises for long periods of time. Whether it’s mowing the lawn, using a chain saw, enjoying a loud concert, or working with any loud machinery—these tasks, over time, can be harmful when the appropriate protective steps are not taken.

• When you are exposed to a loud noise, give your ears the proper time of 16 hours or more of quiet to recover.
• To protect your ears when listening to music, follow the 60/60 rule which suggests only listening with headphones or earbuds for 60 minutes or less per day at 60 percent volume.

Some warning signs of loud noise exposure include ringing in your ears, having difficulty hearing people talk, and experiencing a “fullness” feeling after leaving a noisy area. Consider having regular hearing checks if you think you might be at a higher risk of hearing loss. The earlier hearing loss is detected, the earlier something can be done about it.

Managing your priorities

In a time when we’re stretched to the max, squeezing a little more into each day, the concepts of good time management and to-do lists are old news. We stress over maintaining and accomplishing items on our task lists, but after all the hard work and worry, we often struggle to accomplish the most important things. For some, this is because non-essential tasks are taking priority over the most important items.

For a moment, forget the to-do list and think about the big picture of your personal and professional life. Prioritize your tasks to make sure the most important tasks receive attention.

Analyze your to-do list:
• Identify the most important task of the day and complete it first.
• Identify your highest priorities and schedule those tasks or activities into your day.
• Identify non-essential activities that don’t move you closer to reaching your ultimate goals.
• Identify tasks, large or small, that could be delegated to someone else.
Activate!

COOKING TOOLS

You have your meal plan all laid out, but implementing all of your new and favorite recipes may seem hard to do. With a few helpful tools you can to prep, cook and store your new healthy meals easily.

**Chopped salad scissors or tongs**

Make it easy to cut up all the colorful fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs or proteins you want to put in your salad by investing in special chopping scissors or tongs. With this tool you can chop ingredients fresh, all mixed together in a bowl or to-go container.

**Mini food processor**

This two-cup machine is good for chopping, grinding or pureeing all types of ingredients including herbs, vegetables, fruits, nuts and sauces.

**Food storage**

Invest in an array of plastic or glass food storage containers. These will keep all of your pre-cut vegetables and raw meats, pre-cooked whole grains and sauces fresh tasting all week long.

**Crockpot**

While slow cooking does take longer than 30 minutes, the advantage of this cooking tool comes from the ability to set it and forget it. Start your crockpot on low in the morning before work or on high at noon and you will have a meal ready to go when you get home.

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**Southwest Stuffed Peppers**

Serves: 8  
Total Time: 30 min | Prep: 10 min | Cook: 20 min

**Ingredients:**

- 4 green, yellow or red bell peppers, cut in half, deseeded
- 1 16 ounce jar salsa
- 1 15 ounce can niblet corn, drained
- 1 cup precooked brown rice
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 cup 2% milk shredded pepper jack cheese

**Directions:**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut tops off peppers and remove the membranes and seeds. Slice peppers in half. Prepare filling by mixing salsa, beans, corn, rice and chili powder together in a bowl. The filling can be made up to three days ahead of time. Place equal portions of mixture among the eight pepper halves and top shredded cheese. Bake for 30 minutes.

**Nutrition Facts:**

- Calories: 193
- Total Fat: 2g
- Sodium: 341mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 34g
- Dietary Fiber: 7g
- Total Protein: 11g

Nutrition information compiled using nutritiondata.com

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**Monthly Observances**

Brain Injury  
Colorectal  
Developmental Disabilities Eye  
Donor  
Kidney  
Nutrition  
15—Kick Butts  
27—Diabetes Alert  
5–11—Sleep

Find a complete list of observances at healthfinder.gov/NHO

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