

Learn at Home: Nutrition Lessons for Healthy Living

Meal Planning and Shopping

By choosing to complete this mail lesson, you have taken the first step in learning more about the importance of nutrition and its relationship to good health. This mail lesson will discuss how to make a food budget, plan meals, and make a shopping list. This will save you money, time and stress.

To complete this lesson:

- Carefully read this lesson. It should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.
- Answer the questions included with this lesson.
- When you are finished, place the questions in the prepaid envelope and place the envelope in the mail.

Meal Planning and Shopping

Have you ever asked yourself, “What meal can I make tonight?” Do you ever get ready to make dinner only to find you do not have the items you need? Do you ever run out of food? Do your children complain there is nothing in the house to eat? This lesson will discuss the steps to follow when feeding you and your family.

How do I get started?

There are **four** steps to follow when feeding you and your family:

Step 1: Make a food budget.

Step 2: Plan meals and snacks for your family for a week.

Step 3: Make a shopping list of the foods you need to make the meals and snacks on your menu.

Step 4: Go to the grocery store.



Let’s learn more about each of these steps.

◆ Step 1: Make a Food Budget

During the mail lesson about Resource Management, you learned how to develop a budget. Food is an expense that will be listed on your monthly budget. If you do not have a budget, decide how much money you have to spend on food each month. Remember to include the value of your SNAP benefits (Food Stamps) and WIC vouchers if you receive them.

Now figure out how much money you can spend on each trip to the store. If you shop once a week divide your monthly food budget by four to find out how much you have for food each week. **EXAMPLE:** If your monthly food budget for your family is \$200 and you shop every week, you will have \$50 to spend each week on food. ($\$200 \div 4 = \50). Use the envelope method and place \$50 in 4 different envelopes. Include any SNAP benefits (Food Stamps) or WIC vouchers. Label the envelopes “week 1”, “week 2”, “week 3” and “week 4.”

If you shop twice a month divide your monthly food budget by two. **EXAMPLE:** If your monthly food budget for your family is \$200 and you shop twice a month, you will have \$100 to spend every other week on food. (\$200 divided by 2 = \$100). Use the envelope method and place \$100 in 2 different envelopes, including any SNAP benefits (Food Stamps) or WIC vouchers.

QUICK TIPS:

- Limit shopping to no more than once a week. The more you shop, the more money you spend. This is why making a weekly or monthly menu and shopping list are important!
- If you plan to buy non-food items, such as dish soap or toilet paper at the grocery store, be sure to budget some money for these items.

◆ Step 2: Plan Meals for Your Family

Planning Meals:

- Helps you serve more nutritious meals to your family
- Saves money on groceries
- Saves time at the grocery store and at home when preparing meals
- Reduces stress deciding what to make each day
- Reduces food waste



Now that you know all the good reasons for planning meals, let's get started!

How to Create a Meal Plan:

1. *Make a list of food you already have on hand.* The first step in meal planning is to look at the foods you already have in your home. Look in your cupboards and refrigerator. Make a list of items that need to be used first (fresh fruit or vegetables, cottage cheese, milk, yogurt, thawed meat, etc.) The first few meals you plan should include the items that need to be used first.
2. *Use weekly grocery store ads, coupons and fliers.* If you have access to weekly grocery ads, consider building your meal plan around sale items. List the sale items that you want to buy. Consider what foods your

family likes as you make your meal plan. No matter how big of a bargain a food is, it will be a waste of money and time if your family won't eat it.

3. *Create a weekly or monthly menu.* First, find a calendar that has plenty of space or create your own monthly calendar. Second, make a list of the foods your family likes to eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.



Make a meal plan for

dinner.

Pick a day to start with that is not very busy. Using the list of foods your family likes to eat for the evening meal pick one main dish and write it down. What foods would you like to add to complete your evening meal? Try to include a food from each of the 5 food groups.

Make a meal plan for breakfast. Breakfast is important. It gives our bodies energy and nutrients that help us start the day. Look at the list of foods you wrote down for breakfast. Decide what will be on the menu and write it down. Try to create a breakfast that includes food from 3 of the 5 food groups.

Make a meal plan for lunch. Using your list again, decide what you would like to have for lunch and write it down. If you plan to cook extra food at another meal, plan the leftovers into your lunch meal plan. For example, make extra food for dinner to be used as leftovers for lunch the next day.

Plan Snacks. Snacks are also important, especially for children. Snacks provide a chance to include foods from the 5 food groups that may be missing from meals. What healthy snacks will your children eat? Fruits, like apples and bananas, and vegetables, like carrot sticks make great, healthy snacks.

Take a look at the meal plan you created. Does it look like one you could follow?

Compare to MyPyramid. Now, let's see if the meal plan has foods from the five food groups. Are the right amounts for each of these groups included in your meal plan? If you are missing foods from any group, what foods could you add?

Complete meal plans for the rest of the week. Look at the rest of the week and make a meal plan for

each day. Are there some days that are especially busy? If so, plan leftovers or simple meals for those days.

Planning meals takes some time. But in the long run, planning saves time and money. Give it a try!

◆ Step 3: Make a Shopping List

Using a shopping list will help stretch food dollars, but only if you stick to it!

Create a shopping list. After you have planned your week's meals, read through each day's meal plan and write down the foods you need and how much. Remember, you have planned to use food you already have on hand, so you will not need to buy everything on your meal plan.



Keep a list handy. It helps to keep a piece of paper and a pencil in the kitchen or somewhere you can quickly find it to write down the food you need. Some people keep a list on the refrigerator.

Other items. Don't forget to add non-food items to your list, but remember non-food items at the grocery store may cost more than at a discount store. You may want to group your list into categories such as by the food group or by the store layout.

Shopping once a week. How often do you go to the grocery store? If you go once a week, plan to get everything you need for the week. Stopping at grocery stores to get extra items during the week can lead to spending more money than you planned.

Shopping once a month. If you go to the store once a month, plan to buy some foods that will not spoil in a month, such as frozen foods and canned foods. If you buy fresh foods, such as milk and fresh fruits, buy only what you can use in the first week. Use fresh vegetables and fruits first. Plan to use frozen or canned vegetables and fruits later in the month. Use powdered milk later in the month if you cannot buy milk weekly.

You are almost ready to shop!

◆ Step 4: Ready to Shop!

Decide where to shop. If possible, plan to shop at a large supermarket rather than at small stores like gas stations or convenience shops. These stores often have lower prices and greater selection than smaller stores.



Eat before you shop. Hungry shoppers buy more!

Shop alone, if possible. Children can distract you and talk you into buying items you do not need. Could someone stay with your children when you go to the grocery store? Could you trade childcare with a friend? Never leave children unattended at home or in the car even if you will be gone only a few minutes.

- If you do take your children, go when they are rested and fed. Keep toddlers seated in the cart and use the safety strap if there is one. Keep children busy while shopping. Bring a toy or let them hold unbreakable things, such as boxes of cereal. Ask children questions, such as "What color are the carrots? Do you know where milk comes from?"

Stick to your shopping list and avoid buying extras.

Buy only food items at the grocery store. Get non-food items at discount stores, where they will cost less.

Be flexible with your shopping list. If you have planned corn for tomorrow's supper but carrots are on special, buy the carrots instead.

Buy store brands or no-name brands. They are usually cheaper than name brands and taste just as good.

Look up and down. The most expensive items are often stocked at eye level. Look at the top and bottom shelves for cheaper items.

Use coupons for items you buy, but always consider the store brand. Often the store brand will still be cheaper.



Compare unit prices. The unit price is the price per pound or ounce most stores have unit price labels on the shelf. Usually, the large container will have the best unit price. But if it spoils before it is used you

will not save any money. Individually packaged foods usually cost more. Buy the size that fits your budget and your meal plan.

Compare the cost per serving or meal.

Sometimes the lowest price per pound is not the best buy if the food has parts you cannot eat, like bones. For example, ground beef gives you about 4 servings per pound, while a rib roast only gives you about 2 servings per pound. To find the best buy compare the price of the amount you need for a meal.

Limit extras like sodas, alcohol, candy, gum and chips, which have no nutritional value.

Watch the price scanners at the register and check your receipts for price errors and make sure you get back the correct amount of change.

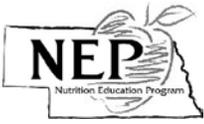
Safety first!

Make grocery shopping the last stop before you go home.

- Place items in your cart so meat juices do not drip on other food.
- Get refrigerated and frozen foods last. Ask the bagger to put all cold foods together in plastic bags so they are better insulated. Also, ask the bagger to place the raw meat in separate bags.
- Put your groceries away as soon as you get home so food does not spoil. If you have a long distance to travel and it is a hot day, bring a cooler to transport refrigerator and freezer items.

Feeding your family will be easier if you plan carefully and have the food you need on hand. Planning menus and shopping with a list will help you manage your money and time, as well as provide an answer to, “What is there to eat?”

This material was funded in part by USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call 1-800-430-3244.



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Meal Planning and Shopping Questions:

1. **True or False.** Individually packaged foods usually cost more.
2. What are steps to take before shopping to help save money?
 - a. Plan meals for your family
 - b. Make a food budget
 - c. Create a shopping list
 - d. All of the above
3. What are some benefits of meal planning?
 - a. Helps you serve more nutritious meals
 - b. Saves money on groceries
 - c. Reduces food waste
 - d. All of the above
4. **True or False.** A hungry shopper tends to buy more food.
5. What is the first step in creating a meal plan?
 - a. See how much money you have
 - b. There is no first step
 - c. Create a meal plan for the whole year
 - d. Make a list of food you already have on hand
6. **True or False.** The cheaper items at the grocery store are often stocked at eye level and the more expensive items on the top and bottom shelves.
7. **True or False.** You can leave your groceries out for hours before you need to put them away.
8. **True or False.** You should compare your meal plan to MyPyramid to make sure you are getting food from all five food groups.



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9. Store brands or no-name brands are usually...

- a. more expensive than name brands.
- b. less expensive than name brands.
- c. same price as name brands.
- d. None of the above.

10. **True or False.** To be sure you use your food dollars wisely you should watch the price scanners at the register, check your receipts for price errors and make sure you get back the correct amount of change.

Mini Goals

Setting goals is important when meal planning and shopping. Please choose or create at least one mini-goal to complete *before your next* lesson.

Based on what you have learned during this mail lesson, what is one meal planning and shopping change you plan to make?

Do you have an idea for a mini-goal? Go ahead and share your idea with your NEP staff member!

For Office Use Only:

Client's Name: _____ ID: _____

Staff Name: _____ Date: _____

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