

MEAL PLANNING GUIDE & CHECKLIST

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS WITH THE 3 ESSENTIAL TOOLS TO HELP YOU PLAN MEALS WITH EASE!

1. HOMEMADE COOKBOOK/ LIST OF RECIPES

Organize your recipes...

- ___ Get yourself a 3-ring binder for organizing and storing all of your successful recipes. Or, create files on your computer to store recipes. As time goes on, only add favorite, successful recipes to your binder or computer files.
- ___ Organize your 3-ring binder by using Divider Sheets with tabs to separate the recipes by Category. Or use your computer to create a Recipe Folder and add "Category" files.
*Please see suggested "Categories For Cookbook" at [amealatatime.com/meal planning](http://amealatatime.com/meal%20planning).
- ___ Type a List of all your Recipes, organized by category. This step is *optional*... but very useful when meal planning. Think of it as your Table of Contents.
- ___ Gather/ Print recipes you'd like to try from websites, cookbooks, magazines, Pinterest, etc.

2. CALENDAR

Have a Plan...

- ___ Get yourself a monthly calendar book devoted just to meal planning, print individual months from a free calendar site such as vertex42.com, or use your phone or other device. If you use individual pages for each month, you will be able to post it on the fridge so others can see what's coming up for dinner!

3. MASTER GROCERY LIST

Shopping is always easier with a list...

- ___ Create your own Master Grocery List or print and use mine at [amealatatime.com/ master grocery list](http://amealatatime.com/master%20grocery%20list). Think about all the items you need to keep your pantry, fridge and freezer stocked and ready for all your meals and snacks.

ONE MORE THING YOU'LL WANT...

- ___ Get yourself a Pocket Folder to hold your List of Recipes (optional), Weekly Meal Plans (see Template), Monthly Calendars, Master Grocery List, and any printed recipes you'd like to try.

NOW YOU'RE READY! LET'S DO THIS!

PLAN

- ___ Plan your meals ahead a week to a month at a time.
**Be realistic and take into account planned activities, appointments and time constraints.*
- ___ Use "Weekly Meal Planning Templates" to make this process easier! *Free printable on website.
- ___ Choose recipes from your "Cookbook" and from your pile of "New Recipes to Try".
- ___ Plan a variety of meals from different categories to ensure balance.
- ___ Write or type your meals on a calendar devoted just to meal planning.

SHOP

- ___ Make a grocery list! Write it down on paper or use your phone.
- ___ Scan your Master Grocery List for any items you need to pick up and take a look at the ingredients needed for any specific recipes you are making and add those to the list.
- ___ Organize your grocery list by sections in the grocery store, i.e., deli, bakery, meat, seafood, dairy, produce, canned/ packaged items, etc., and ideally in the order you go through the store.
- ___ Read food labels and keep an eye out for great sales on healthy, practical items.
- ___ While in the store, stay focused on your list, goals and budget!

COOK

- ___ Prepare as much as you can immediately after returning from the grocery store, i.e. cut-up fruits and veg's, bag snack mixes, meal prep, etc.
- ___ Prepare "to-go" lunches the day/night before.
- ___ On busy days, stick to the meals you are familiar with. When you have more time, be adventurous and try something new.
- ___ At the beginning of your day, review the meals for that day to check if you need to defrost, marinate, prep ahead, etc.
- ___ Read through a recipe from beginning to end first to ensure you are prepared with all necessary ingredients and tools.
- ___ You are in control in the kitchen so feel free to modify a recipe to fit your needs and tastes.
- ___ Determine the order in which you want to prepare each component in your meal for optimal time management.
- ___ Clean as you go so you will not be overwhelmed with too much at the end.
- ___ Always keep some frozen meals on hand just in case dinner does not happen as planned.
- ___ Be safe, relax and enjoy your time in the kitchen!

EAT

- ___ Enjoy your food!

REPEAT

- ___ Before you know it, you'll have a few months of meal plans in your collection which you can use over and over again in a rotation!