

A top-down view of a meal planning collage. In the center is a clear plastic container with a piece of salmon, white rice, and yellow potatoes. To its right is another container with a salad of lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and chicken. Below the central container is a glass bowl filled with broccoli, corn, tomatoes, and chicken. To the left of the central container is a wooden bowl of corn. Below that is a wooden bowl of a cucumber and tomato salad. On the far left are several brown eggs. At the bottom right is a wooden cutting board with a red onion, a yellow pepper, and a green pepper. The background is a brown textured surface.

MEAL PLANNING

WELCOME TO MEAL PLANNING!

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Basic Nutrition Principles

The Importance of Proper Nutrition

What you put into your body is important because proper fuel will help your body perform at its very best. Proper nutrition does not mean you need to eat "perfectly", but without healthy eating, your body will not function as well as it could. Proper nutrition can help in the following ways:

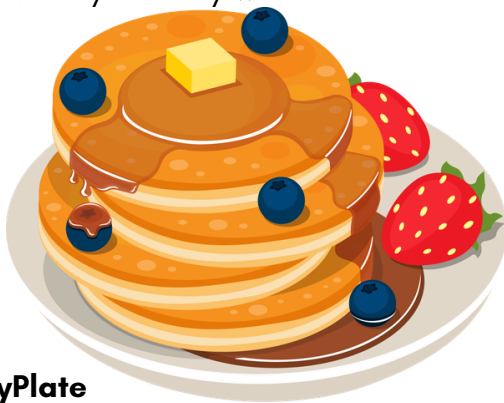
- Increases physical energy levels
- Assists in maintaining a weight that is healthy for YOU
- Boosts the immune system
- Enhances brain function
- Helps prevent serious chronic disease, such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers

Remember that a healthy weight looks different for every body.

Regular Eating Patterns

For your body to function at its best, you need to eat regularly. This generally means eating three meals a day with snacks in between. Your stomach usually takes between 3 and 4 hours to empty, which means you should be eating roughly every 3 to 4 hours. If you feel hungry, eat! Be sure to eat breakfast every day, and do not feel like you need to have a "cut-off" time each night.

Regular eating allows your body to trust that it will get fed, keeps your metabolism running smoothly, helps you have stable energy levels throughout the day, gives your brain energy, and provides your body with essential nutrients.

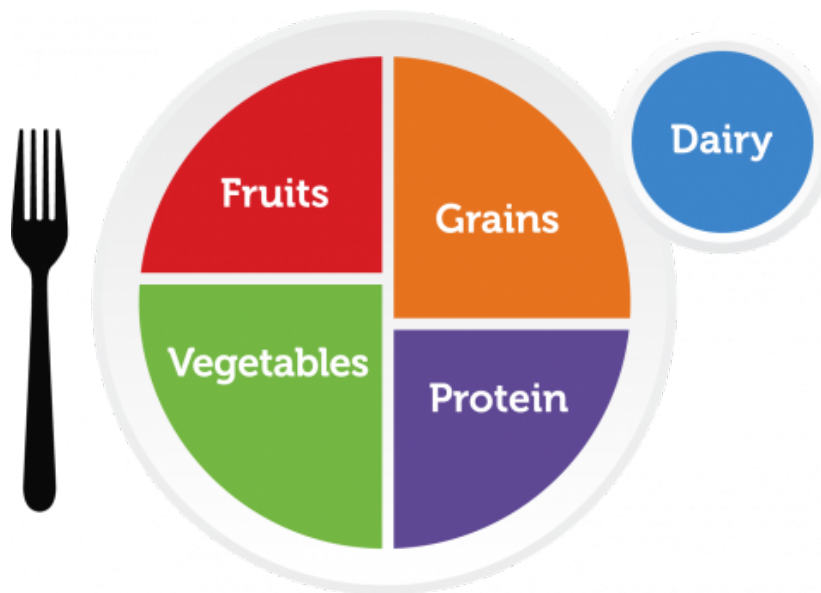


What do your current eating patterns look like?

Are there any improvements you would like to make to your current eating patterns? _____

MyPlate

MyPlate is a visual guideline for nutritious eating created by the USDA. Aim to include at least 3 of the 5 food groups in each of your meals. This will help ensure that you are consuming plenty of nutrients to keep your body healthy.



- **Grains:** It is recommended that you make at least half of your grains whole grains.
- **Fruits:** 2-3 servings of fruit per day is recommended. For example, one serving is equivalent to 1/2 cup of fruit juice or 1 whole piece of fruit.
- **Vegetables:** Aim for 3-4 servings of vegetables per day. As an example, 2 cups of raw, leafy vegetables equals one serving. Including 5 total fruits and vegetables per day into your diet will help ensure you are receiving all of the nutrients you need.
- **Protein:** Eat a variety of protein foods and choose lean or low-fat meat and poultry options when possible.
- **Dairy:** Consider choosing the low-fat or fat-free dairy options if needed. Dairy fat can help you feel full longer.

Are there any food groups that you would like to incorporate more of into your diet? _____

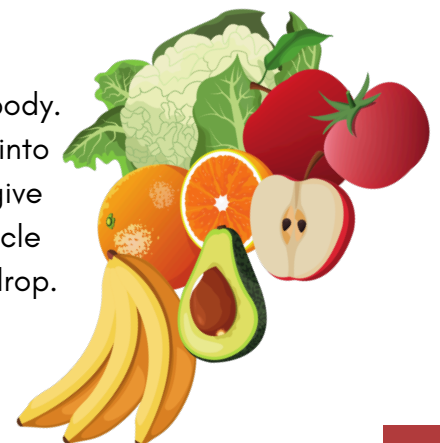
If so, how are you going to do it? _____

Macronutrients

Carbohydrates, fats, and protein are the 3 macronutrients. These are the primary energy sources for the body.

Carbohydrates

The primary purpose of carbohydrates is to provide energy for the body. Carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram. They are broken down into glucose (sugar) molecules and travel through your bloodstream to give energy to your cells. Carbohydrates are stored in your liver and muscle tissue and are used for quick energy when your blood sugar levels drop. Grains, fruits, and vegetables are great sources of carbohydrates, although some can also be obtained from dairy.



- **Simple carbohydrates/simple sugars:** Simple carbs can be broken down and digested very quickly. Most simple carbs will not keep you full for very long because of a lack of fiber. Some examples of simple carbohydrates are white bread, white rice, and refined cereals. Even though they are low in fiber, these foods still provide essential vitamins and minerals.

- **Complex carbohydrates/complex sugars:** Complex carbs are long chains of glucose in the form of starch and fiber. They keep you full longer because they contain fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Some examples of complex carbohydrates are fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread, brown rice, and whole grain cereals.



- **Fiber:** Fiber helps regulate the digestive system, lowers your risk of diabetes and heart disease, reduces cholesterol levels, and helps you feel full longer. It is found in grains (especially whole grains), fruits, and vegetables.
 - **Soluble fiber:** This type of fiber dissolves in water to form a gel-like material that slows digestion. Oatmeal, lentils, apples, and berries are examples of good sources of soluble fiber.
 - **Insoluble fiber:** This type of fiber adds bulk to your stool to help it move through your digestive system. Whole wheat, celery, grapes, raisins, and dark leafy vegetables are examples of good sources of insoluble fiber.

Fats

In addition to providing energy, fats provide satiety and satisfaction to your food. Fats contain 9 calories per gram. Fat protects your inner organs, insulates your body, improves brain function, and helps absorb the fat-soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E, and K).

- **Saturated fats:** Saturated fats come mainly from animal sources and are solid at room temperature. These types of fats raise your LDL cholesterol levels and lower your HDL cholesterol levels, which increases your risk of developing high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes. You do not need to completely eliminate saturated fats from your diet. Work to include more unsaturated fats when possible. Cheese, butter, processed meats, coconut oil, and fried foods are examples of foods containing saturated fats.
 - **Trans fat:** Trans fat is a type of saturated fat that occurs naturally in animal products and artificially during food processing. Artificial trans fats have been banned in the United States since 2018.

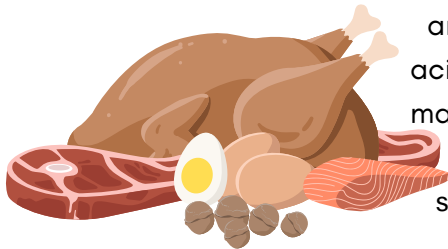


- **Unsaturated fats:** Unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature. These types of fats lower blood pressure, improve blood cholesterol levels, decrease your risk of heart disease, and assist your body with blood sugar control.
 - **Monounsaturated fats:** These are found in a variety of foods and oils, such as olive oil, peanut oil, almonds, and avocados.
 - **Polyunsaturated fats:** Most polyunsaturated fats are found in plant-based foods and oils. Omega-3 and Omega-6 are polyunsaturated fatty acids. Examples of foods containing polyunsaturated fats are fish, soybean oil, walnuts, flax seed, and sunflower seeds.



Protein

Although protein can be used for energy if necessary, its primary function is to build, repair, and maintain organ and muscle tissue. It also helps produce hormones, helps the body balance fluids, and assists the immune system in functioning properly. Protein helps keep your blood sugar stable and helps you stay full longer. Protein is made up of amino acids. There are 20 amino acids that your body uses to make proteins. 9 of these proteins are considered *essential* amino acids and 11 are considered non-essential. Essential amino acids are proteins you must consume because your body cannot make them. Non-essential amino acids can be created by your body. Meat, fish, poultry, legumes, and dairy are common sources of protein.



- **Complete protein:** Animal products, soy products, and quinoa are complete proteins because they provide all 9 of the essential amino acids.
- **Incomplete protein:** Whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, and seeds are incomplete proteins. You can still get all of the amino acids you need by eating a variety of incomplete proteins.

Micronutrients

There are various vitamins and minerals that are essential to the proper functioning of your body. Most people are likely getting all of the micronutrients they need to stay healthy as long as they are eating enough of a variety of nutritious foods from each food group. Vitamins and minerals play several important roles in the body, including:

- Helping convert food into energy
- Repairing cell damage
- Strengthening bones
- Healing wounds
- Boosting the immune system
- Producing blood cells, hormones, and neurotransmitters that are associated with mood and brain function

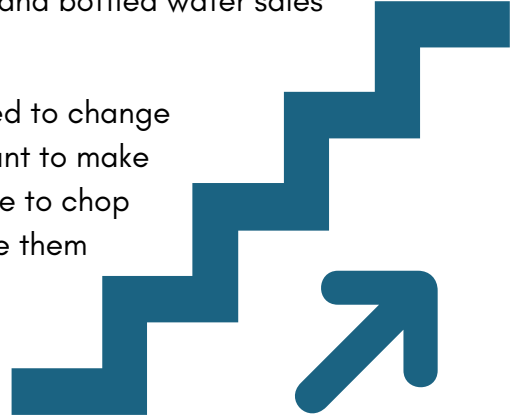


Building Healthy Habits

You will not become an expert meal planner overnight. Building any new habit takes time, patience, and practice. Take it one step at a time. Do not be afraid to experiment to find the strategies that work best for you. Do all you can to set yourself up for success.

In his bestselling book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear described a study done by a physician in a hospital cafeteria in which she made water available at every drink station in the cafeteria, including the refrigerators next to the cash register which had previously only held soda. She also placed baskets of bottled water in several easily accessible locations throughout the hospital. After 3 months, soda sales dropped by 11.4% and bottled water sales increased by 25.8%.

If you want to change your behavior, you will probably need to change something about your environment. For example, if you want to make your snacks more nutritious, use your meal preparation time to chop up your favorite fruits and vegetables so that you can have them easily accessible and ready-to-eat in the refrigerator. Or consider leaving a bowl of fruit on your counter instead of a package of cookies.



James Clear identified 5 steps for creating new habits:

1. **Start with an incredibly small habit.** If your goal is to add an energizing food that will nourish and fuel your body to your usual snacks, start by setting your favorite fruit next to the chips you would normally choose.
2. **Increase your habit in very small ways.** Aim to be 1% better at your new habit each day. Remember to start small. This will increase your motivation and willpower. Consider putting the fruit in a more visible place than the chips.
3. **As you build up, break habits into chunks.** Keep your habits reasonable. If you eat 3 snacks a day, add a fruit, vegetable, or protein to just one snack at a time.
4. **When you slip, get back on track quickly.** If you do not add a more energizing food to each snack time one day, don't sweat it! Start again the next day. Focus on consistency, not perfection. Flexibility is important, too.
5. **Be patient. Stick to a pace you can sustain.** Your new habits should feel easy. If they are hard to maintain, you are probably trying to change too much at once. Only add to 2 of your 3 snacks after one has become easy for you.

What strategies have you found to be helpful in the past when it comes to building new habits or breaking old ones? _____



Benefits of Meal Planning and Preparation

While there are many reasons to plan and prepare your meals in advance, here are a few reasons why it may be beneficial for you:

- **Saves time.** Setting aside a block of time to prepare your meals each week will save you time each day for the things you need and want to do. You will have the opportunity to improve your productivity with this extra time each day.
- **Saves money.** If you have a plan for what you need to buy in the store, you will be less likely to buy other items impulsively. Having a meal plan will also sometimes make eating out less enticing, which can be a big expense!
- **Helps create a more balanced, nutrient-dense diet.** Taking the time to think through each of your meals and making sure you have healthy snacks on hand will help you eat enough and include a variety of nutritious foods from each food group in your diet.
- **Reduces food waste.** You will not buy food you do not need or do not enjoy and you will always know what is in the cupboard!
- **Reduces stress.** More free time, increased productivity, less strain on your budget, and better health will help you feel less stress and more happiness!



What is your motivation for planning and preparing your meals? _____



Take note of the meal planning and prepping strategies and habits, meals, and snacks that you use this week, and record any questions or issues you have.

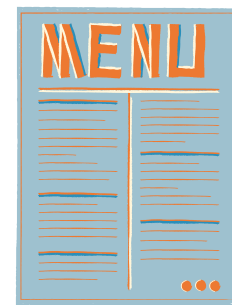


Creating a Menu

Weekly Plan

Set aside some time each week to plan out your weekly menu. When creating a plan for an entire week, write down what you would like to have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner each day. Take into account your schedule, the foods you like and dislike, your abilities, and what you already have available. Here are a few tips to consider when choosing your recipes and making your plan:

- **See what you already have.** You could save time and money by using what you already have in your fridge, freezer, or cupboard.
- **Think about your time and schedule.** For busier days or days when you are short on time, choose meals that are simple and do not take long to prepare. Save the ones that take longer for your days off or when you have others home to help with the preparation.
- **Do not feel like every day has to be different.** Aim for variety in your plan, but also recognize that it is ok to eat a yogurt parfait for breakfast or a sandwich for lunch several times a week. Have several options you can rotate through to keep it interesting.
- **Plan to use leftovers.** Make a double batch of your favorite recipe and plan to eat it on a day when you do not have time to cook.
- **Plan to use a mix of frozen, fresh, and shelf-stable items.** You will generally want to eat your fresh foods earlier in the week when they are best. This will also help you avoid wasting food. Save foods in the freezer or pantry for later in the week.
- **Consider the weather.** A hearty soup can be ideal for a cold, rainy day while a salad with some lean protein may taste best on a hot summer day.
- **Stay flexible.** Some people may benefit from planning out what they would like each specific day of the week. Others may find it more beneficial to create 7 daily plans and choose the one they would like to use when they get to that day based on what sounds good and fits their schedule. This can be especially helpful for last-minute schedule changes. Find what works for you!



Here is an example of what a weekly plan could look like:

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Sunday	Peanut butter and honey oatmeal, banana	Ham and cheese sandwich, strawberries, potato chips	Pasta with marinara sauce, wheat roll, side salad
Monday	Blueberry muffin, scrambled eggs	Leftover pasta with marina sauce, wheat roll	Grilled chicken, grilled asparagus, pineapple, pasta salad
Tuesday	Cold cereal with milk, strawberries	Peanut butter and jelly sandwich, potato chips	Leftover grilled chicken, rice, broccoli, pineapple
Wednesday	Toast, scrambled eggs, strawberries	Ham and cheese sandwich, carrot sticks	Homemade pizza, side salad, pineapple
Thursday	Toast, scrambled eggs, banana	Leftover homemade pizza, side salad	Chicken noodle soup, wheat roll
Friday	Peanut butter and honey oatmeal, strawberries	Leftover chicken noodle soup, orange	Leftover grilled chicken, rice, side salad
Saturday	Cold cereal with milk, banana	Peanut butter and jelly sandwich, carrot sticks	Grilled hamburger, frozen French fries

Are you currently in the habit of creating a weekly plan? _____
 If so, what has worked for you? What could be improved? _____

 If not, what will motivate you to start? When will you create your plan? _____

Daily Menu

Once you have created a weekly plan, you can create more specific menus for each day. Be sure to think through your meals, snacks, and even beverages. As a general rule, try to include 3 of the 5 food groups in each meal for variety and balance. You can use these more specific daily plans to easily create a shopping list. Here is an example of what a daily menu could look like based on Wednesday's plan above:

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast	Toast	Scrambled eggs, strawberries	2% milk
Lunch	Ham and cheese sandwich	Carrot sticks	Lemonade
Dinner	Homemade pizza	Side salad, pineapple	Water
Snacks	Mid-morning snack: smoothie	Mid-afternoon snack: protein bar, banana	Keep a water bottle close to sip on throughout the day

What are some of your favorite meals that could be included in your plan? Favorite snacks? ____

Create a Shopping List

Once you have created a daily menu, you are ready to put together your shopping list! Go through each meal and make a list of all the ingredients and items you will need. Compare that list to your fridge, freezer, and pantry to determine what you need to buy. Here is part of an example shopping list created from Wednesday's daily plan above:

Meal	Ingredients Needed	Ingredients I Already Have	Ingredients I Need to Buy	Shopping List (Partial)
Breakfast	• 2 slices wheat bread • Butter • 2 eggs • Strawberries • 2% milk	• Butter • Eggs • Milk	• Wheat bread • Strawberries	• 1 loaf wheat bread • 1 container strawberries • 1 pkg. sliced cheddar cheese • 1 pkg. carrot sticks • 1 pkg. pre-made pizza dough • 1 can pizza sauce • 1 pkg. mozzarella cheese • 1 pkg. pepperonis • 1 head Romaine lettuce • 1 pkg. spinach • **3 bananas
Lunch	• 2 slices wheat bread • 3 slices deli ham • 1 slice cheddar cheese • Carrot sticks • Lemonade	• Deli ham • Lemonade	• *Wheat bread • Sliced cheddar cheese • Strawberries	
Dinner	• Pre-made pizza dough • Pizza sauce • Mozzarella cheese • Pepperonis • Italian seasoning • Romaine lettuce • Ranch dressing • Pineapple	• Italian seasoning • Ranch dressing • Pineapple	• Pre-made pizza dough • Pizza sauce • Mozzarella cheese • Pepperonis • Romaine lettuce	
Snacks	• Strawberries • Peanut butter • Milk • Oats • Spinach • Protein bar • Banana	• Peanut butter • Milk • Oats • Protein bar	• Strawberries • Spinach • Bananas	

*Notice that some of the ingredients are listed more than once in the last column. Knowing how often you'll need each ingredient can help you determine how much of each to purchase.

**Based on the entire weekly plan.

Grocery Shopping Tips

Now that you have a list, it is time to shop! Here are some other things to consider when creating a list and while purchasing your food:

- **Keep your staple foods stocked.** Have a list of foods you would always like to have in your pantry or fridge, including your favorite snacks or items that are useful when cooking. When you run low, be sure to add these items to your shopping list. These items could include things like condiments, olive oil, vegetable, beef, or chicken stock, herbs and spices, or seeds.
- **Keep a running shopping list.** Keep a list either on your fridge or in your phone that you can add to as soon as you run out of a staple food or think of something you need to buy the next time you are the store. This will prevent you from forgetting things you need when you are at the store. Consider downloading a grocery shopping app. Some apps will even show you which grocery stores have the best deals after you enter your list.
- **Stock your pantry and freezer with the five food groups.** Stocking up on the basics can make it easier to start meal planning. Here are some ideas of foods from each food group you could keep on hand:



Food Group	Pantry	Freezer
Vegetables	• Canned tomatoes • Spaghetti sauce • Dried mushrooms	• Corn • Peppers • Spinach (for smoothies)
Fruits	• Raisins • Dried apples • Dried apricots	• Berries • Bananas • Pineapple
Dairy	• Dried milk • Boxed milk • Evaporated milk	• Pre-shredded cheeses • Frozen yogurt • Butter
Protein	• Canned or dried beans • Canned tuna • Canned chicken	• Salmon • Chicken • Ground beef
Grains	• Oatmeal • Whole-grain cereals • Rice	• Tortillas • Loaf of bread • Frozen bread or roll dough

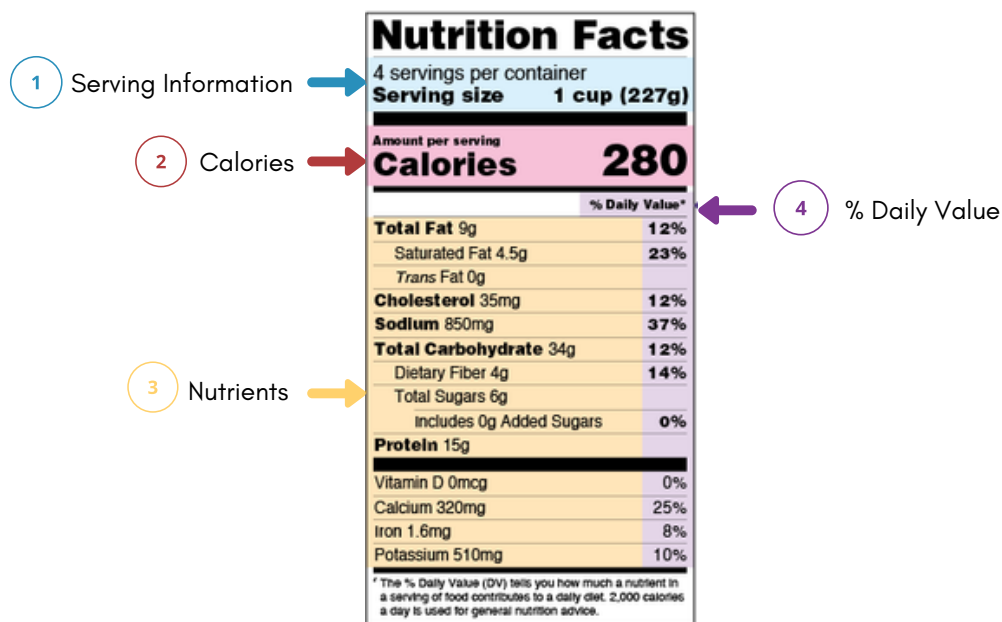
- **Organize your list so that you can be efficient at the store.** Put the items on your list in the order that you will walk past them while in the store. As an example, put all of your produce in the same section on your grocery list so that you only have to visit the produce section once during your shopping trip.
- **Avoid shopping when you are hungry.** If you shop while you are hungry, you will be more likely to purchase things that are not on your list, that are not part of your meal plan, or that end up costing more than you budgeted for.

What grocery shopping strategies (if any) do you currently use? _____

Are there any other strategies you would like to try? _____

How to Read a Nutrition Label

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that a Nutrition Facts label be placed on all packaged foods and beverages. It provides detailed information about a food's nutrient content, such as the amount of fat, sugar, sodium, and fiber it has. Below is a sample nutrition label for frozen lasagna.



1 Serving Information

The first thing you should look at on a Nutrition Facts label is the serving information (the serving size and servings per container). Remember that the serving size is not a recommendation of how much you should eat or drink. It is a reference to help calculate the amount of nutrients in the food such as protein, sodium, or fat.

4 servings per container
Serving size 1 cup (227g)

In the sample label, one serving of lasagna equals one cup. If you eat two cups of lasagna, you would need to double the nutrient values shown on the label to determine how much of each you actually consumed.

2 Calories

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of food. Your calorie needs vary depending on your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level. They can even change day to day. This is why it is important to listen to your hunger and fullness cues. Remember that a lower calorie count does not mean a food is healthier. The nutrition information listed on the label is a better indicator of how healthy a food is.

Amount per serving	
Calories	280

3 Nutrients

The Nutrition Facts label lists key nutrients that impact your health. Use the label to help you find foods that contain more of the nutrients you want to get more of and less of the nutrients you may want to limit.

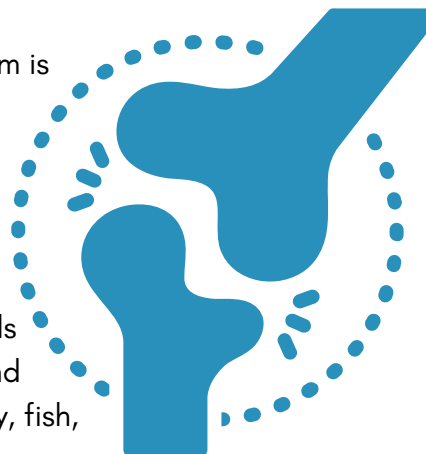
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 4.5g	23%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 850mg	37%
Total Carbohydrate 34g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 6g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 15g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 320mg	25%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 510mg	10%

4 % Daily Value

The Daily Value (DV) percentage on food labels is a frame of reference for your whole day and is based on a 2,000 calorie diet. It can be used to help you determine if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient. As a general guideline, 5% DV or less of a nutrient per serving is considered low, while 20% DV or more of a nutrient per serving is considered high.

% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 4.5g	23%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 850mg	37%
Total Carbohydrate 34g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 6g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 15g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 320mg	25%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 510mg	10%

- **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is important for maintaining strong bones. It aids in the absorption of calcium and phosphorus. It is also an important part of muscle function and helps the brain and body communicate through nerves. Vitamin D can come from sunlight and a few foods, such as fatty fish, cheese, and eggs. Most of the vitamin D in our diets comes from fortified foods and drinks, such as some milks, cereals, and yogurts.
- **Calcium:** Calcium is also important for bone health. Calcium is found in foods such as dairy products, fortified milk substitutes, other calcium-fortified products (meaning calcium was added during processing), some green vegetables (broccoli, kale, etc.), tofu, soybeans, and fish.
- **Iron:** Iron carries oxygen in the hemoglobin of red blood cells throughout the body. Iron helps the body produce energy and maintain a regular temperature. Iron is found in beef, poultry, fish, enriched grains, beans, spinach, broccoli, and nuts. Pair your iron-rich food with a food in Vitamin C to help your body absorb more of the iron.
- **Potassium:** Potassium helps regulate fluid and mineral balance in the body, helps with muscle contraction, and is important for maintaining normal blood pressure. Beans, dried fruit, potatoes, spinach, avocados, and bananas contain potassium. Even though produce does not come with a food label, if you are aiming to eat enough fruits and vegetables, you will get enough potassium in your diet.



Planning Your First Week

Now it's time to create a plan for your first official week of meal planning and prepping! We will go through the same process as the example given earlier in the session and schedule a time to plan, shop, and prepare your meals.

What day(s) of the week will you create your weekly plan and daily menus and create a shopping list? _____

What day of the week will you do your grocery shopping? _____

What day of the week will you prepare your food? _____



Weekly Menu

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Daily Plans

Sunday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Monday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Tuesday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Wednesday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Thursday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Friday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Saturday

Meal	Main Dish	Sides	Beverages
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			

Shopping List

Ingredients Needed	Ingredients I Already Have	Ingredients I Need to Buy

Ingredients Needed	Ingredients I Already Have	Ingredients I Need to Buy

As you carry out your plan note what goes well and what could be improved.

Strategies for Meal Prepping

When trying to find a system that works for you, remember that different strategies work for different people. If something about your meal planning and preparation system is not working the way you want it to, try something else! Here are some ideas that might be helpful for you.



Try New Things

When starting out on your meal planning journey, it may be helpful to create a collection of your favorite recipes. If planning your meals out in advance starts to feel tedious or boring, try spicing things up with a new recipe and adding to your collection as you find new favorites. Changing up your usual snacks can also help keep your menu appetizing and interesting. Plan a menu that makes you excited!

Create a Schedule

Pick a consistent day of the week to plan out your weekly menu and create your shopping list. Designate a day as your grocery shopping day and your preparation/cooking day. (These may or may not be the same day of the week. Choose what works best with your schedule.)

Organize Your Preparation Day

During your preparation time, there are many things you can do to make the

process more efficient and set yourself up for success during the week.

Start by preparing the things that take the longest to prepare. For example, immediately start boiling water if you are planning to cook rice.

Multi-task as much as you can. You can prepare meat or chop vegetables while the rice is cooking. **Prep as many ingredients as you can.** For example, if you do not like to pre-cook your protein, consider marinating it so that it can be prepared quickly on the day you plan to eat it. **Chop fruits and vegetables** to eat as snacks or to use in recipes later in the week and store them in your refrigerator. **Divide your food** into individual-sized containers to use for snacks and lunches to avoid having to take the time to pack your food in the mornings or the nights before.



Sticking to a Budget

In a 2015 study, 70% of college students reported feeling stressed about their finances. Meal planning and prepping can be a great way to relieve some of the stress on your budget and will help you use your resources most efficiently. Here are a few things you can do to make sure you are getting the most bang for your buck, both in terms of meals and money.



- **Buy raw, whole foods in bulk. Stock up.** Raw and whole foods are not prepared or processed, so they usually cost less than buying ready-to-eat, precooked foods. Many stores offer bulk foods at discounted prices. Stock up on your staple foods (such as cereal, rice, pasta, tomato sauce, nut butter, and canned goods) when they are on sale to save money later on. You could also consider purchasing raw meat in bulk, cooking it yourself, and storing it in your freezer to use for quick, easy meals.
- **Use your freezer.** Cook your meals in large batches and freeze the rest for another night. This can be especially helpful if you do not enjoy eating the same meal multiple nights in a row or during the same week but do not want to waste any food or money. Stock up on frozen meats and vegetables when they are on sale. These can be prepped easily and will last a long time.
- **Plan your menus around the sales.** Plan your menu around produce that is in-season. You will save the most money on sales for meats. Watch for store sale flyers and available coupons online and in the mail for additional savings. Take advantage of grocery store loyalty programs.
- **Grow your own.** If you have room for it, consider creating a small garden, garden box, or pot with a few of your favorite types of produce, such as tomatoes, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, or herbs. Not only will it save you money, but homegrown produce often has a better flavor!
- **Cook more meals at home.** Eating out every once in a while can be fun and delicious, but the cost adds up over time. Cooking at home leaves you in charge of the ingredients and eliminates labor costs involved with restaurant meals.

- **Find a use for everything before it goes bad.** Have a plan for leftovers. For example, plan to make sandwiches or soups with extra servings of chicken or roast. Do a quick inventory of your fridge once or twice a week to make sure you use everything you have. Freeze leftovers you are not going to eat soon, freeze ripe bananas for smoothies or banana bread, and put your wilting vegetables into a pot of soup or pasta sauce.
- **Use coupons only for foods you normally buy.** Having a coupon is not a good excuse to purchase a specific food. You will end up spending more than usual, even if you have a coupon. Watch for coupons on the foods you are already planning to purchase!
- **Buy generic brands.** The store brands of packaged foods are generally a better value than commercially branded items, often with little difference in quality.
- **Check unit prices.** Look for the unit price or price per serving labels on grocery store shelves. Be sure to check high and low because the least expensive items and brands are often on the top and bottom shelves.
- **Purchase high-nutrition, low-cost foods.** Frozen fruits and vegetables are rich in nutrients and often cost less. Instead of expensive meats, try beans, lentils, eggs, or canned fish. Potatoes are another low-cost, filling option.



What money-saving strategies do you already use? _____

Are there any other strategies you would like to try? _____

Easy Snack Ideas

It is important to keep your body fueled throughout the day so that you can feel and perform at your best. Snacking in between meals can help you avoid getting too low on the hunger scale and will keep your energy levels steadier throughout the day. In most of your snacks, aim to include a carbohydrate and a protein or a fat. Here are some easy, nutritious snacks you can add to your menu!



Snacks

- Fresh fruit with yogurt dip
- Fresh carrots, celery, or pita and hummus
- Homemade protein balls
- Granola bars
- Protein bars
- Yogurt, granola, and fruit
- Smoothie
- Cheese and crackers
- Apples and peanut butter
- Sandwich

- Avocado toast with eggs
- Dry cereal with milk
- Popcorn
- Pretzels and nut butter
- Muffins
- Bagels and cream cheese
- Nuts, seeds, or trail mix
- Hard boiled eggs
- Chocolate milk
- Beef jerky

What are some of your current favorite snacks? _____

Are there any new snacks you would like to incorporate into your weekly or daily plans? _____

Seasonal Foods

Purchasing produce that is in season will enhance the flavor of your food and will take some of the strain off of your budget! Seasonal produce will vary based on your location, growing conditions, and the weather. If any of the produce you would like to purchase is not in season or is too expensive, remember that you also have the option to purchase it frozen, canned, or dried. Here are a few examples (keep in mind this list is nowhere near exhaustive).

Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
• Avocados • Bananas • Carrots • Lemons • Onions • Oranges • Pineapples • Potatoes • Pumpkin	• Apricots • Asparagus • Broccoli • Kiwifruit • Lettuce • Limes • Peas • Spinach • Strawberries	• Bell Peppers • Blueberries • Cherries • Corn • Green beans • Mangos • Tomatoes • Watermelon • Zucchini	• Apples • Brussel sprouts • Cauliflower • Grapes • Kale • Peaches • Pears • Radishes • Raspberries

Basic Cooking Terminology

How much experience have you had with cooking in the past? _____

Are there any new cooking skills you would like to learn? _____

Some people learn the basics of cooking and food preparation from a very young age, while others leave home with very little knowledge or ability in the kitchen. Wherever you find yourself on that scale, it is never too late to learn more and improve your skills! Here are some basic cooking terms you may come across in your recipes.



Term	Definition
Bake	Cook by dry heat, usually in an oven.
Beat	Rapidly stir ingredients together with a spoon, whisk, or mixer.
Blanch	Place fruits or vegetables in boiling water for a very short amount of time (usually 30 seconds or less), then quickly move the food to a bowl of ice water to stop cooking. Blanching seals in flavor and color. Helpful when preparing to freeze fruits or vegetables.
Blend	Thoroughly combine two or more ingredients either by hand or with a mixer.
Boil	Cook in water that has reached 212 degrees F. Water will bubble and bubbles will burst when boiling.
Broil	Cook directly over or under high heat, usually in an oven.
Chop	Cut into small pieces.
Dice	Cut food into very small cubes (usually 1/8 to 1/4 inch cubes).

Term	Definition
Drain	Remove all the liquid, usually with a colander or strainer or by pressing a plate against the food while tilting the dish.
Fry	Cook in hot oil on high heat. Food is usually immersed in oil.
Grate/shred	Make thin pieces by scraping the food against the holes of a grater.
Grease	Rub or spray the inside of a cooking dish or pan with fat or oil to prevent sticking.
Knead	Work a dough (ex. bread or pasta dough), usually with your hands by stretching, folding, and pushing. Helps to strengthen and add texture to the finished product.
Marinate	Place foods into a flavored liquid so that the flavors can be transferred.
Mince	Cut food into very small pieces (smaller than dicing or chopping).
Poach	Cook gently over a low heat in barely simmering liquid that barely covers the food.
Puree	Mash or blend food until it has become a liquid.
Roast	Cook a large piece of meat or poultry, uncovered, in dry heat, usually in an oven, or cook vegetables coated in a small amount of oil in high, dry heat.
Saute	Cook food in a small amount of fat (such as butter or oil), over relatively high heat.

Term	Definition
Sear	Brown the surface of a meat by cooking quickly over high heat. Helps seal in the juices.
Simmer	Cook in a liquid that is just below boiling. Water will bubble, but bubbles will not burst.
Steam	Cook on a rack or in a steamer placed over boiling water.

Getting Familiar with Various Cooking Appliances

What cooking appliances do you currently have available to you? _____

Which cooking appliances do you use most? _____

When trying new recipes, do not be afraid to leave your comfort zone and try new methods of cooking. Some cooking appliances (like air fryers or pressure cookers) are great for quick meals and reheating leftovers, while others (like crock pots) can be used when you want to prepare your meal in the morning and have it ready for you when you get home from work or school. If you have one available, try these appliances to change up your menu and cooking routine!

Picture	Name	Description
	Air fryer	An air fryer is essentially a countertop convection oven. It does not actually <i>fry</i> your food, although it does mimic the effects of deep frying by creating a crisp exterior. The difference is that it requires little to no oil. Convection ovens typically require more oil to get the same results and take longer to heat up.

Common uses: Cooking foods that are typically deep fried, roasting vegetables, cooking meat, baking (as long as the batter or dough does not start as a liquid), cooking frozen foods (such as frozen French fries), reheating foods you want to stay crispy

Picture	Name	Description
	Blender	Blenders generally have a tall jar and one blade and are most often used for wet recipes. They are usually used for pureeing, whipping, and crushing foods. Use a blender instead of a food processor when you want a smooth or creamy texture.
Common uses: Making smoothies, purees, batters (such as French toast batter), salad dressings, soups, and frozen drinks		
	Crock pot/ slow cooker	A crock pot simmers food at a low temperature for a long period of time. The "low and slow" method of cooking makes it great for tenderizing or breaking down big pieces of meat, like pot roasts. They also cook foods evenly without stirring or extra help required. This makes it easy to leave them cooking all day when needed.
Common uses: Cooking or heating large pieces of meat, soups, chilis, and warm drinks		
	Food processor	Food processors generally have wider work bowls than blenders and include several types of blades to be used for different types of foods. Food processors can puree and whip like blenders, but they can also mince or grind meat, chop nuts, shred or grate cheeses, vegetables, and potatoes, slice fruits and vegetables, and knead dough.
Common uses: Chopping or slicing vegetables for soups, salads, or salsas, quickly chopping nuts, making homemade hummus or pesto, grating or shredding cheeses		

Picture	Name	Description
	Grill	A grill allows you to cook food on a metal grate over flames or hot coals. Be sure to use a thermometer when grilling meat, poultry, or fish to ensure it is getting cooked all the way through.

Common uses: Cooking meat, fish, poultry, whole vegetables (such as corn), sliced vegetables, and some sliced fruits (such as pineapple)

	Pressure cooker/ Instant Pot	Pressure cookers are airtight pots that cook foods quickly using steam pressure. (Instant Pot is a specific brand of pressure cooker.) The airtight seal is what creates the pressure. The pressure can be released through the natural release method (letting the pot cool and releasing the pressure naturally) or the quick release method (pressing a specific button or handle on your pot). When using the quick release method, be sure the hole on top of the steam release is pointed away from you because the steam released will be hot enough to burn you.
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Common uses: Cooking beans, stews, soups, potatoes, meats, and rice

Are there any cooking appliances you would like to learn how to use? _____

If so, how could you obtain access to one? _____

Food Handling, Preparation, and Storage Safety

As you are handling, preparing, and storing your food, be sure to do it safely. Improper handling or cooking food can lead to foodborne illnesses, such as Salmonella or E. coli. You cannot see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria in food. Remember to **clean, separate, cook, and chill**. Keep the following guidelines from the USDA in mind as you carry out your meal preparation plan.

Shopping

- Organize your shopping list so that you choose your frozen and refrigerated items after you have selected your nonperishable items.
- Never choose meat or poultry that is leaking or in a torn package.
- Do not buy food past its expiration date, including "use by" and "sell by" dates.

Storage

- Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (sooner if it has been out in warmer temperatures).
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, and ground meats within 2 days and beef, veal, lamb, and pork within 3 to 5 days.
- Wrap raw poultry and meat securely to avoid getting juices on other food.
- High-acid canned foods (such as tomatoes and pineapple) can be stored unopened on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid canned foods (such as meat and vegetables) can last 2 to 5 years as long as the cans remain undamaged and in a cool, dry location.
- Never store an opened canned food in the refrigerator. Put the food into a separate container first. Storing food in the can in the fridge can cause botulism.

USDA Cold Storage Chart

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40 degrees F)	Freeze (0 degrees F)
Beef, Lamb, Pork, Veal			
Fresh beef, lamb, veal, and pork	Ground, hamburger, stew meat, variety meat (tongue, liver, heart, kidney, chitterlings)	1-2 days	3-4 months
	Chops, roasts, steaks	3-5 days	4-12 months
	Chops, pre-stuffed	1 day	Does not freeze well
Leftovers	Including casseroles	3-4 days	2-3 months

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40 degrees F)	Freeze (0 degrees F)
Corned Beef	In pouch, with pickling juices	5-7 days	Drained, 1 month
Bacon	Bacon	7 days	1 month
Ham (Pre-Cooked)			
Fully Cooked	Slices	3-4 days	1-2 months
	Half	3-5 days	1-2 months
	Whole	7 days	1-2 months
Canned Labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Opened	3-5 days	1-2 months
	Unopened	6-9 months	Do not freeze
Vacuum sealed	Unopened, fully cooked vacuum sealed, dated	"Use-by" date	1-2 months
	Unopened, fully cooked vacuum sealed, undated	2 weeks	1-2 months
Chicken, Turkey, Other Poultry			
Fresh	Chicken breast, pre-stuffed	1 day	Does not freeze well
	Ground, patties, giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40 degrees F)	Freeze (0 degrees F)
Fresh	Pieces	1-2 days	9 months
	Whole	1-2 days	1 year
Leftovers	Casseroles	3-4 days	4-6 months
	Chicken nuggets, patties	1-2 days	1-3 months
	Pieces, plain or fried	3-4 days	4 months
	Pieces in broth or gravy	3-4 days	6 months
Eggs			
Fresh	In shell	3-5 weeks	Do not freeze
	Yolk, whites	2-4 days	1 year
Leftovers	Casserole, quiche, omelet	3-4 days	2 months
	Hard-cooked	1 week	Does not freeze well
Opened	Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	3 days	Does not freeze well

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40 degrees F)	Freeze (0 degrees F)
Unopened	Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	10 days	1 year
Sausages, Lunch Meats			
Hard Sausage	Jerky sticks, pepperoni	2-3 weeks	1-2 months
Raw Sausage	Beef, chicken, pork, turkey	1-2 days	1-2 months
Smoked Sausage	Breakfast links, patties	7 days	1-2 months
Lunch Meat	Deli-sliced or store- prepared	3-5 days	1-2 months
Opened	Hot dogs	1 week	1-2 months
	Lunch meat-vacuum- packed, sliced	3-5 days	1-2 months
	Summer sausage labeled "keep refrigerated"	3 weeks	1-2 months
Unopened	Hot dogs	2 weeks	1-2 months
	Lunch meat - vacuum- packed, sliced	2 weeks	1-2 months

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40 degrees F)	Freeze (0 degrees F)
Unopened	Summer sausage labeled "keep refrigerated"	3 months	1-2 months
Seafood			
Fresh	Fish	1-2 days	3-8 months
	Shellfish	1-2 days	3-12 months
Leftovers	Fish and shellfish	3-4 days	3 months
Miscellaneous			
Frozen Dinners and Entrees	"Keep frozen"	Unsafe to thaw	3-4 months
Mayonnaise	Commercial, "refrigerate after opening"	2 months	Do not freeze
Other Leftovers	Gravy and meat broth	3-4 days	2-3 months
	Pizza	3-4 days	1-2 months
	Soups and stews	3-4 days	2-3 months
	Stuffing	3-4 days	1 month
Salads	Egg, chicken, ham, macaroni, tuna (store- prepared, homemade)	3-5 days	Does not freeze well

Thawing

- The refrigerator is a safe, slow way to thaw. Be sure that meat and poultry remain wrapped and sealed so that the juices do not drip onto other foods.
- To thaw in cold water, place food in a leak-proof plastic bag and submerge in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes and cook immediately after thawing. This is a faster alternative to thawing food in the refrigerator.
- If you choose to thaw meat and poultry in the microwave, cook it immediately after thawing.



Preparation

- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds both before and after handling food.
- Avoid cross-contamination. Keep raw meat, poultry, and fish away from other food. Wash any counters, cutting boards, and knives with hot, soapy water after cutting raw meats.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.

Cooking

Each type of meat needs to be cooked to a different internal temperature before being removed from the heat source to be sure it is safe. Allow meat to rest for at least 3 minutes before consuming. You can cook your meat to a higher temperature if that is your personal preference.

- **145 degrees F:** raw beef, pork, lamb steaks, chops, roasts, and fish
- **160 degrees F:** ground beef, pork, and veal
- **165 degrees F:** poultry, leftovers, reheated meats

Serving

- Keep hot food at 140 degrees F or warmer.
- Keep cold food at 40 degrees F or colder.
- Use a food thermometer to check hot and cold holding temperatures.
- Do not keep perishable food out for more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour when the temperature is 90 degrees F or above).



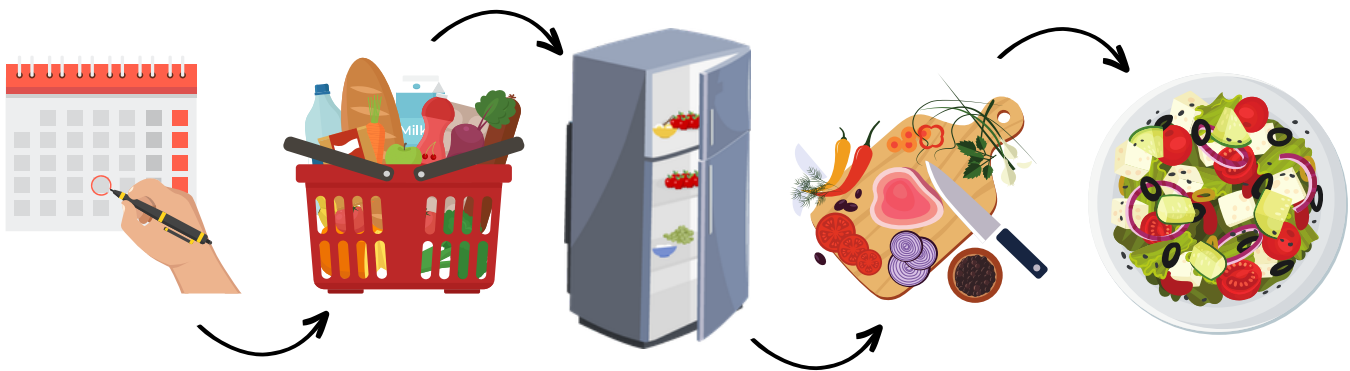
Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if the temperature was above 90 degrees F).
- Immediately place food into containers in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use most cooked leftovers stored in the refrigerator within 3 to 4 days (see USDA Cold Storage Chart above for specific types of leftovers).
- Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F.

Refreezing

You can refreeze meat and poultry that has been defrosted in the fridge either before or after it has been cooked. If it was thawed by other methods, be sure to cook it before refreezing it.

What could be done to improve the safety of your personal food handling, preparation, and storage? _____



Your Goals

1. _____
2. _____

As you go forward, remember that it is more than ok to adjust any goals or strategies that aren't working for you. Creating new habits takes time and effort, but you can do it!

Sources

- | | |
|---|---|
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| • Arizona Health Zone | • Taste of Home |
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