

NUTRITION MATTERS

HEALTHY MEALS FOR FAST-PACED LIVES

Today's fast-paced life has families eating out more than ever. This usually means less healthy food options as well as less opportunity to eat together. However, busy families can still get healthy meals on the table and eat together in less time than most people think. Here's how:

A little planning goes a long way

Planning ahead makes it easier to prepare healthy meals. It can help to cut down on trips to the store, save you money, and reduce ordering take-out.

Once a week, set aside some time to plan your family's meals for the week ahead. When menu planning, take time to consider:

- What's in your fridge, freezer and cupboards
- What your family likes to eat
- Your family's evening activities
- What foods are on sale and in season
- Your food budget

PLANNING YOUR MENU

- Look at grocery store flyers to help you plan based on what's on sale.
- Choose meals that can be used for leftovers.

- Plan meals according to [Canada's Food Guide](#) that include a variety of foods from the three food groupings.
- Make vegetables and fruit your snack of choice.
- Post the week's menu and recipes on the fridge. This will help reduce the number of trips to the grocery store.
- Keep a list of meal ideas from friends, family and coworkers.
- Use your weekly menu to create a shopping list. Keep your list on the fridge so food items can be added during the week.
- Have some quick meal ideas ready such as a stir-fry, breakfast for supper or a slow cooker meal.
- Check out Unlockfood's [menu planning tool](#) for a one week personalized menu.
- [Check out Dietitians of Canada web-videos on](#) how to plan, shop and cook.
- For more [ideas on meal planning](#) visit Health Canada's website.

GET THE ENTIRE FAMILY INVOLVED

Families who make and eat meals together have healthier eating habits. Have your family help with cooking and clean-up. This will save time and will teach your children important life skills!

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Younger children can help set the table and older children can help get the food ready. Get your kids in the kitchen by having them try some [age appropriate activities](#).

Get organized! An organized kitchen and the right tools will make preparing tasty and healthy meals easier and more enjoyable.

TIPS FOR GETTING ORGANIZED:

- Wash and prepare fruits and vegetables ahead of time and keep them near the front of your fridge for easy access. Pack snacks and lunch items into easy-to-grab small portions using baggies and small plastic containers. Some snack ideas include: grapes, berries, raw vegetable sticks and dip, or cheese and crackers.
- Separate large packages of meat, fish and poultry into meal-sized portions and date them before putting them into the freezer.
- Make space on the lowest shelf of your refrigerator to thaw meat, poultry, fish and other frozen foods.
- Use dishes that are safe for use in the microwave, oven, fridge, freezer and dishwasher to cut down on dishes.

HEALTHY TOOLS FOR THE KITCHEN

Having the right tools in the kitchen can help you save time and energy. Here are some tools to consider.

- **Slow cooker** – saves time by letting you cook a meal without being there.
- **Indoor grill** – allows you to quickly prepare grilled food all year-round.
- **Steamer** – a quick and healthy way to cook vegetables or fish.
- **Two cutting boards and knives** – one set for raw meat, poultry and fish and one set for produce and ready-to-eat foods.
- **Blender** – great for making smoothies, soups, sauces and dressings.

- **Recipes** – Save your favourite online recipes. Try websites like Cookspiration and Big Oven.

CONVENIENCE FOODS

Canned, frozen and packaged convenience foods are sometimes more expensive but can help to speed up preparation time and can be part of a nutritious meal plan.

HEALTHY CONVENIENCE FOOD IDEAS:

- Pre-cut vegetables, such as coleslaw, stir fry vegetables, spinach and lettuce can be used as a base for salads. Try adding cherry tomatoes, baby corn or mini carrots for extra colour and crunch.
- Pre-washed small potatoes roast quickly.
- Steam frozen vegetables to keep colour and flavour.
- Frozen fruits can be used in smoothies, on cereal, or in a fruit crisp.
- Canned fruit (packed in its own juice) is great for dessert, on salads, or with yogurt.
- Canned legumes that have been rinsed, such as chickpeas, beans or lentils make a healthy and easy alternative to meat.
- A cooked rotisserie chicken with a salad or vegetables for an easy supper.
- Precooked beef or chicken strips can help make stir-frys and fajitas a breeze.
- Pre-shredded, low-fat cheese for topping on pasta, pizza or salads.
- Canned salmon or tuna (in water) can be used to make fish cakes.
- Fillets of fish (e.g., salmon, trout) can be broiled in the oven in minutes.
- Peeled and cored pineapple makes a healthy snack or dessert.

Using the Nutrition Facts table

Nutrition information on food labels helps you understand what's in your food. Some pre-packaged foods are higher in salt, sugar

and/or fat and lower in fibre. Use the Nutrition Facts table on the food package to help you make healthy choices.

The % Daily Value (% DV) can help. It puts nutrients in a package on a scale from 0% to 100%. If something has less than 5%, this means there is very little of that nutrient in that food item; more than 15%, means there is a lot. For nutrients like sodium, saturated and trans-fats, look for foods with lower % DV. For nutrients such as fibre, iron and calcium aim for foods with higher % DV.

For more information, visit [Health Canada's website on food labelling](#).

Cook once; eat twice!

Weekends are a good time to prepare big batches of food that can be refrigerated or frozen for busy days.

When cooking in big batches, it is a good idea to prepare two or three meals that have some of the same ingredients to maximize your time. For example, cooked ground meat, onions, peppers and tomatoes can be frozen into meal portions for future meals such as spaghetti, Shepherd's pie, chili, or as a topping for baked potatoes.

Freeze meal-sized portions in airtight containers or re-sealable freezer bag to use on busy nights. Label the containers with the date made and name of the dish.

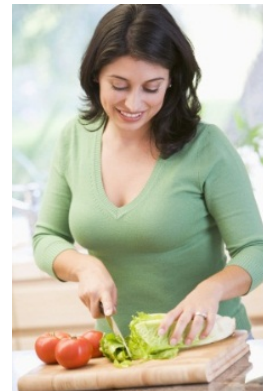
IDEAS FOR "BIG BATCH" COOKING:

- Soups, stews, curries, dahl or chili
- Dumplings
- Tomato sauce
- Casseroles (e.g., lasagna, enchiladas)
- Cut-up cooked vegetables
- Muffins, loaves or scones
- Pre-cooked meats (e.g., sliced cooked chicken breasts, cooked ground meat)

GET CREATIVE WITH LEFTOVERS

Get the most out of your time by cooking more food that you can use for the next lunch or supper. Below are some ideas on how you can use leftovers:

- Use extra vegetables in frittata, pasta sauce, soup or in a wrap with hummus.
- Cook a double batch of brown rice. Make stir-fried rice, add to soups, use for congee or make rice pudding.
- Add extra whole wheat pasta to soups, stir fries, a baked pasta dish or a pasta salad.
- Use extra salmon fillets for fish cakes, salmon salad or add to a green salad.
- Cook extra chicken breast or pork tenderloin. Use as a topping for pizza or salad, in quesadillas, toss with whole wheat pasta and leftover vegetables, or in sandwiches.
- Roast a whole chicken. Use in casseroles and soups, make chicken salad for lunches, or add slices to a green salad.



Always defrost your meal in the fridge or microwave. Do not leave frozen meals on the counter to thaw at room temperature. For more information on food safety visit www.york.ca/foodsafety

Stock up!

Having a well-stocked pantry, fridge and freezer means having a ready supply of basics that will help you pull together tasty and nutritious meals and snacks in hurry.

IN THE CUPBOARDS

- Canned fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils
- Tomato-based pasta sauces, salsa
- Dried fruit (e.g., apricots, raisins, dates)
- Whole grain cereals
- Whole wheat pasta, couscous, quinoa
- Brown and wild rice
- Flour (whole wheat)
- Quick rolled oats
- Whole grain crackers
- Peanut or other nut butters
- Nuts and seeds
- Canned fish packed in water (e.g., salmon, tuna)
- Vegetable oils (e.g., canola, olive)
- Vinegar (e.g., rice, white, red, balsamic)
- Herbs and spices
- Low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth

IN THE FRIDGE

- A variety of fresh vegetables and fruit
- Low-fat milk, cheeses and yogurt
- Eggs
- Tofu
- Low-fat salad dressings, mayonnaise, mustard and ketchup

IN THE FREEZER

- Frozen vegetables (e.g., broccoli, peas, okra, edamame, carrots, corn)
- Frozen fruit (e.g., strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, melon)
- Whole grain breads, pitas, tortillas
- Frozen plain fish fillets and seafood
- Frozen poultry and lean meats

COOL, DARK STORAGE

- Root vegetables (e.g., potatoes, yams)
- Fresh garlic and onions

Fast and easy meal ideas

Keep a list of quick meals on hand for weeknights:

- Personalized omelettes! Family members can choose their own fillings. Some ideas include cheese, peppers, green onions or tomatoes. Spice it up with salsa or hot sauce. Serve with whole grain English muffin, toast or fruit.
- Beautiful beans! Mix canned black beans with frozen corn, chopped tomato, onion and green peppers. Add lime juice, cumin, salt and pepper for flavour and stuff into a whole grain pita.
- Stir-fry! Use frozen vegetables and leftover meat or tofu to make a quick meal. For a stir fry, cook shrimp and add broccoli pieces and garlic in a large skillet or wok. Flavour with lower-sodium broth and lemon zest. Serve over brown rice.
- Wrap it up! Wraps are a great way to use your leftovers. Place some cooked ground beef, leftover chicken, canned tuna or scrambled egg in a whole grain tortilla. Top with lettuce, tomato, avocado, sour cream and salsa.
- Fabulous fish cakes! Using canned salmon or cooked salmon fillet, add to it minced celery, green onion, red peppers, an egg and breadcrumbs. Form into patties and bake on a lightly oiled pan until golden brown. Serve with steamed broccoli or carrot and celery sticks. For a delicious addition, make a simple aioli sauce by mixing desired amount of lemon juice, hot sauce and horseradish into light mayonnaise.

Visit UnlockFood.ca for more [ideas on using up leftovers in a creative way](#).

For more information and additional nutrition resources, visit york.ca/nutrition or unlockfood.ca

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

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