

# CREATE YOUR EATING PLAN

Meal planning is crucial for success, but many find it intimidating due to time constraints and cooking skill concerns. Acknowledging these challenges, eating healthy doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. By following a few basic guidelines, it can get even easier.

## Know what you want to eat next week

To eat healthily, plan your meals for the week to shop in advance for the right ingredients. Understand which foods to eat and their portion sizes according to the Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid. Visual guides can help you estimate servings and their corresponding food groups on your plate.

## The Pyramid

The pyramid's structure serves as a straightforward guide for what and how much to eat. Focus primarily on the base, which is made up of vegetables and fruits. These foods have low energy density (calories per serving), allowing for larger portions without a significant calorie intake. This is why it's recommended to prioritize vegetables and fruits over other food categories, as they provide the least calories for their volume. As you move up the pyramid, the food groups gradually increase in energy density. To effectively lose or manage weight, it's important to consume less of these higher-calorie foods. Therefore, limits are set on the daily intake of whole grains, lean proteins, dairy, healthy fats, and sweets.



The Pyramid encourages eating low-calorie, high-volume foods to help with weight loss or maintenance. Its foundation consists of unlimited fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits, while whole grains, protein, dairy, and unsaturated fats are included in moderation for a healthy diet.

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## Step-by-step meal planning

These steps can simplify and streamline your meal planning:

### Step 1: Set aside time twice a week for food prep.

Chop and cook ahead for the next three to four days. Pack veggies or meats in meal-sized portions for the fridge.

### Step 2: Try batch cooking.

Cook once for multiple meals. Here are some ideas:

- Cook a big batch of brown rice. Use some for a side dish one day, in a casserole the next and in a stir fry the day after.
- Brown extra ground meat and divide it up for casseroles, tacos, and salads. Refrigerate what you can use within three to four days and freeze the rest in recipe-ready portions.
- Prepare extra pasta and set aside some for a cold salad the next day.
- Make a large pot of homemade soup or chili and freeze it in smaller portions.
- Mix a double recipe of meatloaf and divide it in half. Bake one half as a meatloaf, roll the other half into meatballs, and freeze. You can also freeze leftover meatloaf slices for sandwiches.
- Simmer chicken breasts or a roast in the crockpot, and slice leftovers for sandwiches later. You also can freeze individual portions for a quick reheat later in the week.

### Step 3: Overlap ingredients.

Think of different meals with similar ingredients and assign them to the same week's plan. For example, a meal of brown rice, chicken, and sauteed vegetables one day can become a chicken, rice, and veggie soup the next. The same basic ingredients can be used for veggie lasagna and veggie pizza. Prep all the veggies for a week's worth of meals.

### Step 4: Recycle your menus.

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## Timesaving strategies

Menu planning is one of the best ways to cook healthy meals. Sure, it takes time on the front end, but if done right, it can save you valuable time in the kitchen.

One easy way to start meal planning is to pencil in theme nights, such as:

- **Meatless Monday**
- **Taco Tuesday**
- **Leftover Wednesday**
- **Breakfast for dinner Thursday**
- **Fish Friday**
- **Soup and salad Saturday**

Set Sunday aside for planning and prepping meals for the week. That might be the day you treat yourself to a dine-in or take-out dinner.

Try these healthy meal ideas when you're in a hurry:

- Fried egg sandwich - Serve on a whole-grain English muffin along with a piece of fruit.
- Light lunches - Mix-and-match tuna or hummus, whole-grain crackers, fruit and veggie sticks, and a glass of milk.
- Main dish pasta salad - Mix leftover cold pasta with tuna or another protein, vegetables and light mayo.
- Microwaved oatmeal - Pair with fruit and a hard-boiled egg.
- Stir fry - Sauté steak, chicken or tofu with frozen vegetables and brown rice.
- Whole-grain pita pizza - Add a side salad.

**MyFitnessPal is a top health and nutrition app that serves as a fitness tracker, macros counter, diet planner, and nutrition coach.**

Apple



Android



Kristi Wempen, R. D. N. (2024b, May 1). Tips for healthy eating in a hurry. Mayo Clinic Health System. <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/tips-for-healthy-eating-in-a-hurry>

# HEALTHY ROAD TRIP SNACKS

## IN THE BAG

- Applesauce.
- Single-serving bags of veggie chips.
- Single-serving containers of tuna.
- Single-serving packets of unsalted nuts, like almonds or cashews.
- Homemade trail mix with nuts, seeds and dried fruit (add some dark chocolate chips for a hint of sweetness).
- Air-popped or bagged popcorn (stick to kinds that are low in salt and no butter).
- Low-sugar protein bars and powders.
- Peanut butter sandwiches on whole-grain bread.

## IN THE COOLER

- Fresh veggies, like baby carrots, celery sticks, bell peppers, snap peas or mini cucumbers.
- Fresh fruits that don't make a mess, like bananas, apples, plums, apricots or grapes.
- Low-fat string cheese or cheese slices.
- Single-serving containers of hummus or guacamole.
- Whole-grain wraps with deli turkey or chicken, avocado, shredded carrots and hummus.
- Water.

## SHOPPING AT CONVENIENCE STORES AND GAS STATIONS

- Applesauce.
- Low-fat Greek yogurt.
- Hummus with veggies.
- Fresh fruits.
- Pre-cut veggies.
- Oatmeal.
- Single-serving bags of veggie chips.
- Single-serving containers of tuna.
- Single-serving packets of unsalted nuts, like almonds or cashews.
- Air-popped or bagged popcorn (stick to kinds that are low in salt and no butter).
- Trail mix without candies.
- Low-sugar protein bars.
- Bottled water or canned sparkling water.

CLEVELAND CLINIC. (2024, SEPTEMBER 18). HEALTHY SNACKS WHEN YOU'RE ON THE GO. [HTTPS://HEALTH.CLEVELANDCLINIC.ORG/THE-BEST-TRAVEL-SNACKS-FOR-EATING-ON-THE-ROAD](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/the-best-travel-snacks-for-eating-on-the-road)