



## Meal Preparation Tips

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In terms of getting meals on the table quickly, that's a challenge no matter what size family you have and what your schedule is. I think the key thing is to put a bit of time aside on the weekend to plan what you actually want to prepare. That way you don't open the refrigerator and say, "What am I going to make today?" That causes more trauma than I can imagine. The advice that we would normally give is to try to plan out what you're going to cook each day. For example, we're going to have pasta and meatballs on Monday, a stir fry on Tuesday, a curry on Wednesday, we're going to have potatoes, meat and vegetables on Thursday, and pita bread pizzas on Friday. So planning those things out, writing your shopping list, that's the best way to keep the costs and the expenditure on food down.

Actually, they've shown that writing a list helps you avoid the environment of the supermarket which is planned to get you to purchase things you don't really need. So if you go in with a list you're more likely to come out with what you actually planned. Also you're less likely to choose things that are on special which are more likely to be the less healthy options. Planning to buy in slightly larger volume can help. For example, you can plan to buy a whole head of broccoli or cauliflower and it can be split between 2 dinners. That's a better way of using the vegetables.

Plan to have as much color as possible in your dishes. I encourage children, and also adults, to "eat a rainbow." Think about how many vegetables you are putting in. Is there nice color there? We know that one of the things that drives children's likelihood of consumption is a meal that's colorful engaging visually.

The other thing for a busy family is trying to bulk prepare if that's something that works for you. Maybe making a large lasagna and freezing it so that you can just cut it up put it on a plate and serve a salad with it. Similarly if you're going to have to say potatoes one day pre boiled in their skins and then the following day you might have it mashed up on the plate with the rest of the meal. So those things can potentially increase the speed with which you actually get your dinner on the table.

A stir fry or any those kind of quick on the counter meals are a quick way to get a tasty healthy meal on the table. For example:

- Heat 1 cup of brown rice and 1 cup of water in a pot. As soon as it starts to boil immediately reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 40 minutes
- Place some chopped up vegetables like broccoli or sugar snap peas in a bowl and pour some boiling water over them for 3 to 5 minutes
- Mix some chicken with a bit of soy, honey, garlic and ginger

- Stir fry for 7 minutes
- Drain the vegetables
- Add to the chicken and stir fry another 3 minutes
- Serve over the brown rice

With a bit of practice, you can get a healthy meal on the table in no time. There's no downside to using say pre-prepared vegetables if that works for you. Those packages of either fresh or frozen vegetables are as good and healthy as fresh hand cut ones. Frozen peas are a great time saver. You just chuck those into the stir fry. You don't even have to thaw them you just throw them in. Frozen vegetables can be a really handy thing for a parent to have on hand.

So think about what works for you. But smart shopping usually helps you get over the line when it comes to trying to make a meal quickly because you know what you're going to do so you just get stuck into.