

Plan Smart, Conserve Food: Meal Planning Toolkit



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**Food Conservation
& Waste Reduction**

Acknowledgments

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What is Meal Planning?

Meal planning is the process of picking your meals and the ingredients you need for them ahead of time. Whether you are mapping out a few dinners or preparing for the whole week, this tool is designed to help you build an easy, realistic routine that fits your life.

Why Meal Plan?

The core benefit of meal planning stems from making food decisions during a low-stress time, so you don't have to worry about what's for dinner during a high-stress time.

Save Time. Depending on the meal planning strategies you adopt, you can streamline your routine to reduce the time spent deciding what to eat and take fewer trips to the grocery store.

Reduce Stress. Feel good about mealtimes and enjoy a smoother day knowing you already have a plan in place for your next meal.

Save Money. Buy only what you need, reduce impulse purchases and avoid buying ingredients you already have at home.

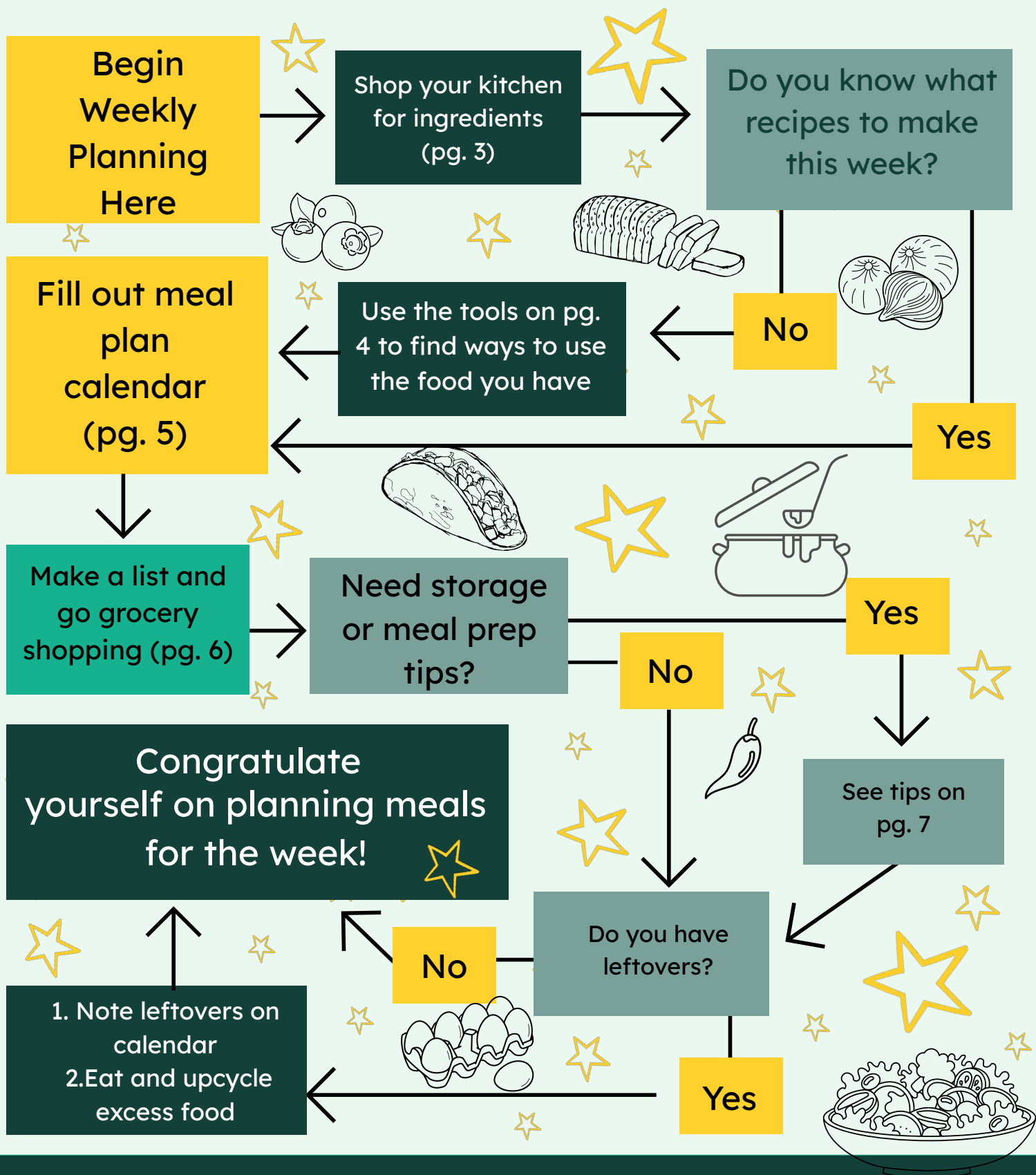
Promote Health. Make balanced, intentional food choices ahead of time. Last minute meals tend to be less healthy.

Reduce Waste. Planning meals around what you already have helps you get the most use from your food and buy less.

Ready? Let's go! Use the decision tree on the next page or follow along in this booklet to plan your meals for the week or days ahead. Feel free to adapt the tools and suggestions to make it work best for you and your household!



Mastering Meal Planning: Your Weekly Guide



Turn Ingredients into a Meal Plan

Use these websites to give you meal ideas based on the foods you already have at home!

Budget Bytes: This website has low-cost recipes for a wide variety of tastes and dietary needs. Use the Ingredient Index page (under the dropdown entitled “Recipes”) to find recipes that use the foods you already have.



Super Cook: This website also gives recipe suggestions based on the foods you want to use.



OzHarvest: This website has flexible recipes to help use leftovers or commonly wasted foods, helping you get the more from your food.



Save More Than Food: This website tells how to “cook once, eat twice” helping users save time, stretch their food further, and reduce overall food waste.



Write Down Your Meal Plan

1. Write the range of days that your meal plan will cover.
2. List items you already have that may spoil soon and include them in your meal plan.
3. Check your schedule. Skip planning meals for days where you will be eating out or at a social event. Plan easy meals for busy days.
4. Think about using one food in multiple meals to save time. For example, cook rice once, but use it for 2 different dishes.
5. Write down one meal per white square. You do not need to fill out all the squares! Do what works best for you!

Meal Plan Calendar

Week of: _____ 1

Use These Foods/Ingredients This Week: _____ 2

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Breakfast							
Lunch				3-5			
Dinner							

Leftover Foods or Extra Ingredients for Future Meals: _____

For Next Week's Grocery List: _____

Scan the QR code to access the full Meal Planning Guide online!

You can print this tool.



That's it! You are finished planning! Next, you'll use your plan to make a shopping list.

The bottom of the Meal Plan Calendar can help you get a head start on next week's meal plan. As you make the meals that you planned, write down any new leftovers so you don't forget about them. You can also note the items you run out of and then add them to next week's grocery list.



Shopping List

A shopping list helps you stick to a budget, avoid extra trips to the store, choose healthy foods, and spend less time shopping.

Look at your Meal Plan Calendar and write down each food that you will need to buy on your shopping list.

Organize your list to save time at the store! Group foods on your list by grocery store section. The shopping list provided has sections for produce, meat/deli/seafood, frozen, dairy + eggs, pantry items, and others.

You can also set a weekly grocery budget before shopping and compare this amount to what you spend at the store.

The image shows a sample shopping list form titled "Shopping List". It is organized into several columns and sections. The sections are: Produce, Meat/Deli/Seafood, Frozen, Dairy + Eggs, Pantry Items, and Other. Each section has a list of checkboxes and lines for writing items. At the bottom, there is a field for "Weekly Grocery Budget: \$" and a logo for the "CENTER FOR Food Conservation & Waste Reduction".

You can print this tool.



Tips

- Check off items after you grab them and don't buy things that are not on your list.
- Buy in-season produce, frozen and low sodium/no added sugar canned fruits/vegetables, or store brand items to save money and nourish your body.
- Compare unit prices (price per ounce/pound) to find the best deal.
- Read food labels and pick foods high in fiber but low in added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. Foods high in fiber help keep you fuller for longer!



Meal Prep Tips

Wash & Chop. Prep veggie and fruit so they are ready to grab for quick snacks or easy cooking. Chop onions and other foods to make future meals easier.

Batch-Cook. Cook large amounts of rice, quinoa, or roasted vegetables, so you can easily use them for multiple meals throughout the week (cook once, eat twice).

Freeze Extras. Don't wait- freeze foods right away if you know you will not be able to use them all.

Storage Solutions

- **Use Clear Containers.** Store leftovers and prepped produce in clear containers so they are easy to see.
- **Practice F.I.F.O. (First In, First Out).** Move older groceries to the front of the fridge or pantry when putting away new items so they are used before new items.
- **Create an "Eat Me First" Bin.** Put a bin at eye-level for foods and leftovers that need to be eaten quickly. Print an "Eat Me First" sign for your bin.
- **Check your fridge temp and be sure to keep it at 40° or lower.** If your fridge is above this temp, foods spoil faster and the risk of food poisoning increases.
- **Keep your food fresh and safe to eat** by limiting the amount of time you open your fridge door. Leftover foods only last about 4 days when fridge doors are opened a lot or stay open for longer. When fridge temps are consistently at 40° or lower, leftovers can last for one week in the fridge.

