

-Top 10 Menu Planning Tips and Tricks-

1. Keep. It. Simple!!

The easier it is to follow, the more likely you are to stick to it. Use meals that you know your family loves, and you'll have confidence that they are going to enjoy it. If you make too big a deal out of simply laying out a plan, then you'll add stress for no reason, and never want to do it again.

2. Keep a well stocked, and organized pantry.

You don't need everything, but a good selection of the essentials can go a long way in keeping you prepared.

3. Plan ahead for the next week, or 2 weeks, or even month.

The more meals you can plan ahead for, the less work you need to do each day when it comes to dinnertime. So make a list of recipes, check what you have on hand and make a grocery list for the things you are missing.

4. Keep Inventory.

What's buried in the bottom of your freezer? What spices are you running low on? How many boxes of KD do you have left? When you know what you've got, you're more likely to eat it. When you use the food that you already have, then you aren't wasting money each week wondering if you really NEED that extra bag of pasta.

5. SHOP THE FLYERS!!

Whether you're trying to stay on a budget, or just like to save money, checking those weekly flyers can get you a heck of a lot more for your dollar. Think ahead to upcoming weeks and what you might like to make. Have an ongoing list of pantry essentials that are running low and watch for them to go on sale - then STOCK UP! You can see what meats are on sale, and plan your meals accordingly.

6. After grocery Shopping, PREP.

Clean all your produce before you put it away. Chop up your veggies the way you need them for the meals you have planned. Assign containers or bags to each day of the week, to keep yourself organized. Group together ingredients so that when dinner times rolls around, you're all set up. This will take away all the stress of having to figure it out on the spot.

7. When you cook a meal, make a double or even a triple batch.

Things like casseroles, chilli, spaghetti sauce, soups and stews all freeze incredibly well. So make a huge pot, and divide it into family sized portions. This makes for super easy meals on nights when you're tight on time, and need something quick. Or when you realize at the last minute that you in fact, did forget to grab that can of corn and now your whole dinner is ruined. Trust us, no matter how well you plan... this will happen.

8. Plan for leftovers.

Make more than you know your family will eat. This way you have food to pack for lunches the next day. No drive thru, no wasting money, and your family will be eating much healthier because of it. Just because you had Thai curry for dinner, doesn't mean that you have to have it again the next day. Use your imagination and turn those leftovers into a delicious Thai Curry Soup for lunch.

9. Create a Family Favourites Binder.

A perfect spot to keep all your favourite recipes for easy reference. Use dividers to categorize types of dishes (appetizers, casseroles, beef, chicken, pork, pastas, etc.) so you can easily find what you're looking for. Keep your recipes in page protectors so that they hold up to being used over and over again, but will also be safe from food splatter and sticky fingers. You can also add in a section of "recipes to try" to keep those ripped magazine pages in order. Then as you try them have the family vote! If majority enjoyed it, add it to your binder. If it wasn't a hit, then toss it in the recycle and never think of it again.

10. Have fun with it, and make it work for you.

You want to add in a take-out night (or two)? GO FOR IT! You want planned dinner to look more like "Monday - Hotdogs and Kraft Dinner" THEN LET IT BE DONE. This is all about what works for you and your family, and how to take away the stress of getting that food on the table. Whatever works for you, is THE ONLY way to do it