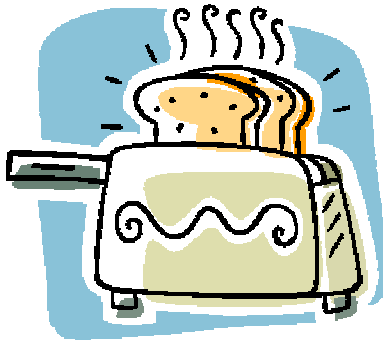


Menu Planning Made Easy!

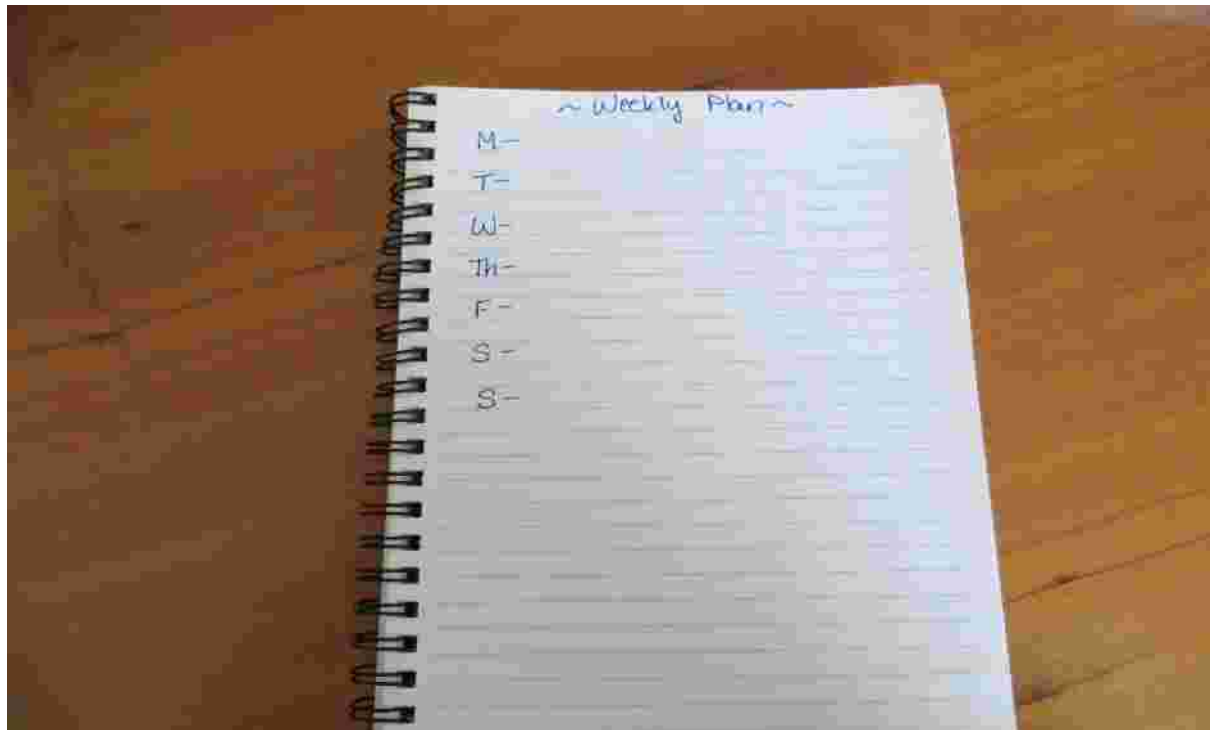


What do you need to get started?

- Weekly ad – select 1 or 2 local grocery ads
- List of your families favorite ten meals
- Two favorite cookbooks (or recipe websites)
- Notebook or planner & pencil
- Weekly schedule
- Cup of coffee or tea

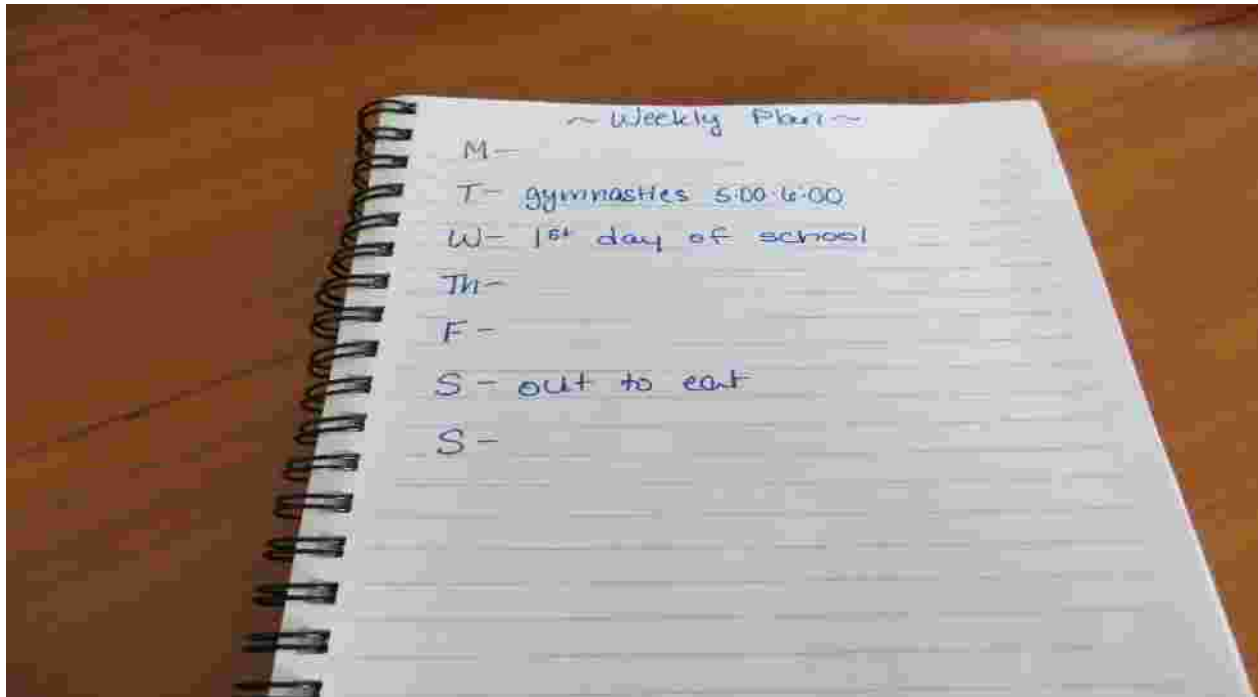
First Step: Get started!

- Create your weekly menu plan – start with whatever day works best for you, but include at least one week (if not two).



Second Step: How's the week look?

- Look at your weekly schedule and note the following:
 - If you'll be away from home in the evening
 - Plans you have to go out to eat
 - Special occasions



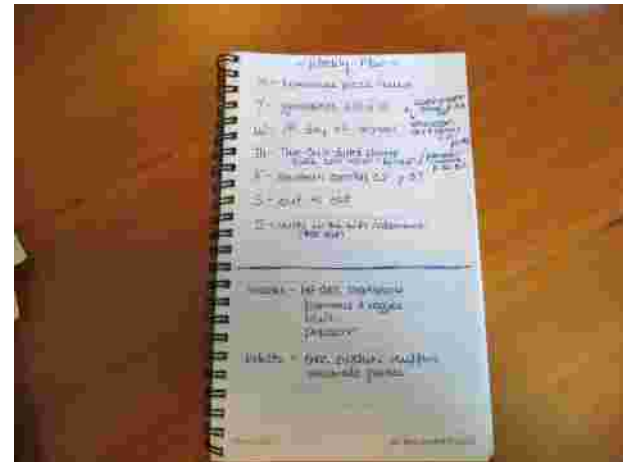
Third Step: Check out the ads

- Get those 1 or 2 weekly grocery ads and take a look through them
 - Make a note of any great sales
 - Create a list of meats that are on sale this week or if you have some already in your freezer, list those.



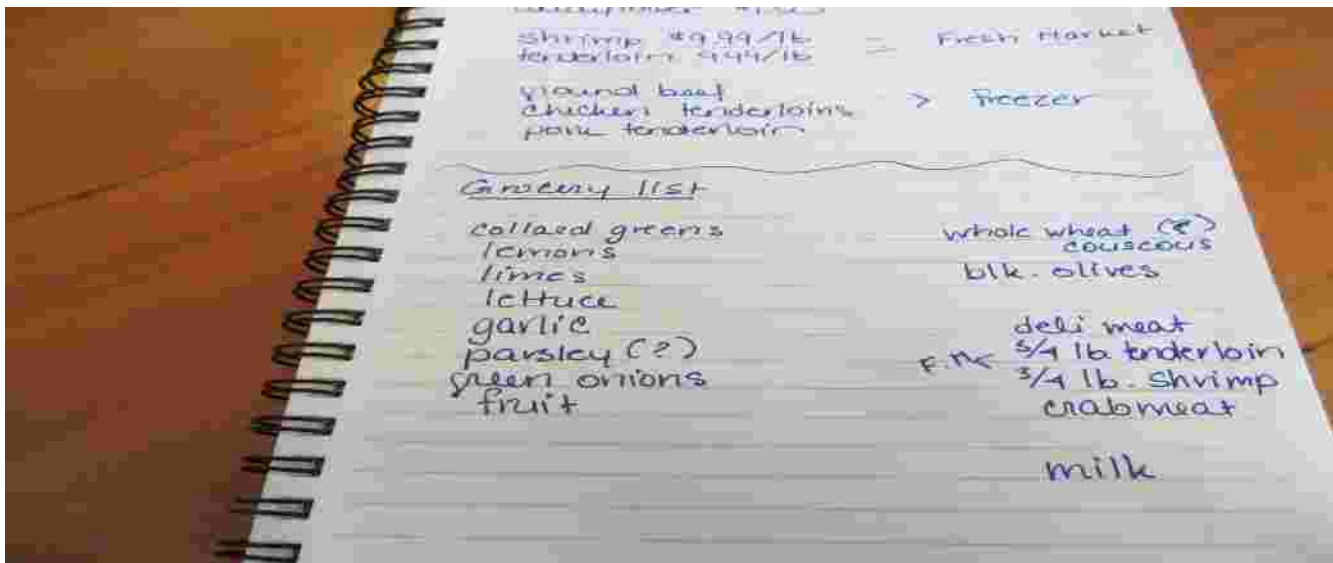
Fourth Step: Browse your cookbooks & schedule your meals

- Think about how busy each night is before you select a particular recipe – maybe you need a crock pot meal or a super quick dinner for a night you KNOW you'll be busy.
- Use the index in the cookbook to match up sale items
- Mix up your main dishes: pasta, vegetarian, beef, chicken, etc.
- Try two or three new recipes and add in your family favorites for the other nights
- Write down the page number and cookbook next to the recipe name
- If you use a magazine recipe or something off the computer, make a stack of necessary recipes in order of preparation to keep with the weekly menu.
- Add snacks and breakfast ideas – will make the whole week easier.



Fifth Step: The Grocery List

- Using your selected recipes, make a grocery list.
- Take into account what you have on hand already – if I don't know, I simply put a question mark next to the item and check the pantry or freezer before I go to the store.
- Don't forget to add any staples you need for the week: milk, fruit and veggies for snacks, yogurt, butter, bread, etc.
- If there were any spectacular deals in your ad(s), write them down too. Often I'll just write in "fruit" and then pick up what is on sale and looks good once I'm at the store – just buy enough for one (or two) weeks.



Sixth Step: Any savings?

- Take a look at your list and see if you have any coupons for anything. You might find that much of your list consists of whole foods – not unusual once you start cooking more!
- If you don't have any coupons (or don't cut them out like I do – I just keep the whole inserts), check out <http://www.coupontom.com> or <http://www.couponsource.com>
- and see if there is anything out there.
- For my list I found the following coupons: \$.30 off yogurt, \$.75 off earthbound organic lettuce and \$2.00 off Pomegranate juice. Since Meijer doubles up to \$.50 that's a quick \$3.35 – took me five minutes.
- Since the deals on meat and shrimp this week aren't at my weekly store, I'll purchase them ONLY at Fresh Market and then buy the rest at Meijer – I know the prices will be less – even for the organic items.



Seventh Step: Go to the store

- ONLY BUY WHAT IS ON YOUR LIST!!!



Eighth Step: Prep for your week

- Prepare any veggies or fruits for snacks right away.
- Go ahead and chop the ingredients for tomorrow's dinner if needed (maybe the next two nights if you want)
- Make up one or two of your snack/ breakfast items for the week – this is great to do before you chop veggies – the dish can bake while you chop/ clean the kitchen.



Tips to keep on track

- Each morning (or the night before while you are cleaning the kitchen) take a look at your menu plan for the next night – can you do anything ahead of time to make it easier? Does that meal still make sense or should you switch it with another meal?
- Don't freak out if the week doesn't work out exactly the way you planned it. Sometimes things come up and you have to make changes – I often find we unexpectedly go out to eat or to a friends house, everything shifts back a day, and I end up making Sunday night's planned dinner on Monday of the next week.
- It might seem expensive and time consuming at first, but once you get comfortable with this process (give yourself at least a month of consistently planning your menus) you'll find yourself saving money (you'll automatically pick recipes that include lots of ingredients you already have on hand, you won't buy "extra" food that you don't need) and time (it WILL become second nature – takes me about half an hour a week to plan and half an hour to shop).
- Not sure what dinners to pick? Keep it easy at first and ask for your families help – maybe let them each pick one meal for the week or start out with five of your families favorites.

Additional Resources

- My three favorite “desperation meals” – it’s easy to always have the ingredients on hand to prepare these three quick and easy meals.
- Menu Planning form
- Additional support: healthcoachpam@att.net