

What are you eating for dinner tonight?

Five reasons to plan your weekly food intake

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1. It will save you money.

- A weekly shop for at least 5 dinners, breakfast items and lunches can cost between \$60-90 per person.
- Buying lunch daily can cost around \$60 per week, that's almost \$3000 a year!
- Several smaller trips to the supermarket at \$20-30 per shop can add up to over \$100 due to buying extra foods on spur of moment or more expensive ready to eat meals.
- For example, a ready to cook pasta and sauce can cost \$10 whereas cooking from scratch can be less than \$5.



2. It will save you time and takes the stress out of thinking about food during the week.

- Do you ever get to the end of the day and realise there's nothing for dinner? Not only do you have to come up with an idea, you still need to shop for the food and then prepare the meal, at this point a little anxiety or stress may start as you consider your options. All too often you take the easy option which requires the least effort and you end up eating a meal you know wasn't the best choice.
- Writing up a simple meal plan (see example below) and shopping list, shopping for food and cooking up meals in advance can take less than 3 hours once you've got the hang of it. This also saves time and takes the stress out of thinking about food during the week.
- Shopping for food as you go involves several supermarket trips during the week, taking up valuable time. Not to mention the time spent wandering around the supermarket while you work out what to eat!
- Meals cooked in advance means you can get home, relax (or do some exercise) and then just reheat your meal when you're ready to eat. Cooking from scratch will take 30 minutes to over 1 hour.



3. Helps weight loss and preventing weight gain.

- Having meals already planned and the ingredients at home means you're less likely to take the easy take-away/fast food option when you feel too tired to think about healthier choices.
- Knowing what you're eating for dinner also helps guide food choices during the day and often makes it easier to hang out till dinner time rather than grazing on bits and pieces while you consider what to eat.
- Home-cooked meals tend to have less kilojoules/calories than bought or pre-prepared meals. For example, a steak or fillet of fish with a baked potato and veggies/salad contains around 1800kJ and 15g fat. Whereas a ready to eat pasta and sauce or take-away meal can contain more than 3000kJ and 40g fat per serve.
- Take-away or pre-prepared meals are cooked with extra oil/butter and carbohydrate as this is a cheap and easy way to add flavour and bulk to meals. It is better to add bulk with veggies and flavour with herbs, spices, chilli and garlic.
- A weekly meal plan and shop means you're less likely to need to go to the supermarket when you are hungry. Have you noticed how everything looks more enticing when you're hungry and how you end buying snacks you didn't plan to?



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4. You can indulge on the weekend!

- Given there are 21 meals in week, if you ensure 18-19 meals are sensible, healthy and kilojoule controlled, you can relax and enjoy your preferred choice on the other 2-3 meals.
- Eating a higher fat or larger more indulgent meal a couple of times a week will not contribute to weight gain if the rest of your diet is balanced.
- You can also get away with some extra kilojoules from alcohol without it affecting your weight.



5. Your intake of fruit and veggies will naturally increase.

- Nearly all my clients say they know they should eat more fruit and vegetable and that they struggle to get enough even when they try.
- Planning ahead means you can ensure you buy enough veggies for each meal and buy 14 pieces fruit to have your 2 per day.
 - ✓ Tip: frozen veg are a good alternative to fresh, add extra frozen veggies to any ready to eat meals you may have.
 - ✓ Keep fresh veggies in plastic bags in the crisper of your fridge and they will stay fresh all week. Keep mushies in a paper bag.
 - ✓ Buy more veggies than you think you need and any left-overs can go into a soup, casserole, Bolognese sauce or omelette.
- Most ready to eat and take-away meals contain only small amounts of vegetables. This can leave you feeling hungry after dinner and means you miss out on valuable vitamins and minerals.



Meal plan

Sat – Fish & veg (3-4 different types)

Sun – Chicken, pumpkin & spinach risotto

Mon – Left-over risotto

Tues – Zucchini & Carrot slice (cook on weekend)

Wed – Steak & veg (3-4 different types)

Thurs – Smoked salmon frittata

Fri – Eat out or take-away

Lunches – Zucchini & Carrot slice (3 lunches) and tuna & salad wraps (2 lunches)