



Most of us are pretty busy in our day-to-day lives. Whether you are a parent, student, or working full time, it can be hard (or absolutely impossible!) to cook all of your meals at home each day. This is where meal preparation (aka “meal prep”) can quickly become your best friend! Without meal prep, you increase your chances of eating junk or convenience foods if you get busy or caught out without food.

### ***What is meal prep?***

Meal prep can mean different things to each person, so it is important you find a routine that works for you. Basically, it should save you time in the kitchen and make it easier for you to eat healthier during the week. You may choose to prepare only breakfasts, dinners or even all of your meals, including your snacks. You may need to use a little bit of trial and error to get settled into a routine that suits your lifestyle and preferences. If you always find yourself in a hurry to get out of the door in the morning and your breakfast consists of a takeaway croissant, then preparing breakfast will help you. Likewise, if you struggle to get dinner together because you work late, you should focus on preparing dinners.

### **How to Meal Prep**

The first thing you need to do is invest in some good quality containers - these can be Tupperware or the glass variety. Keep in mind that if you are going to be reheating your food in these you want to choose ones that are BPA free and won't fall apart in the microwave/oven. If you are going to be prepping for a few days in a row, it can be a good idea to buy containers that are the same sizes so they can be easily stacked.

### **Plan**

Before actually starting your meal “prep”, the first thing you need to do is PLAN. If you are just starting out with meal prep, don't overwhelm yourself! Cooking up a whole week's worth of meals is a big task and even the best of us can struggle with that. My biggest tip is to ensure that it is manageable! I recommend sticking to a few days at a time to help you get you used to the process.

Having a meal plan is super important, there is no use going to the grocery store chucking random things in your cart and hoping for the best when you come out. In order for your meal prep to work you need to know what you are cooking and when. Like I mentioned before, organizing a whole week can be intimidating, so try and stick to 3-4 days at a time if that seems more manageable. Write down each breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack you will be eating, then break that down into a list of ingredients, and how much of each you will need to last over that

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3-4 day period. It is best to stick to tried and tested recipes so that you don't end up cooking a bunch of food you don't really like the taste of.

It is also a good idea to use recipes that can be prepared in advance and won't spoil (for the most part). For example, overnight oats are a great breakfast recipe that can sit in your fridge for a few days.

### **Prep**

There are SO many ways to prep your food, I will go through some of the things that work for me, but remember you should adjust it to suit your lifestyle. Firstly, a big thing for me is taste. Like all of you, I love eating healthy foods that taste amazing. Unless you are a hardcore clean eater, cooking up 5lbs. of plain chicken breast and steamed broccoli probably won't float your boat, unless you're Ben☺ I love experimenting with flavors, in particular spices and homemade marinades and dressings. I like to accompany my lean proteins with some sort of sauce or spice coating, or a lemon and olive oil dressing to jazz up my veggies. Try to incorporate as much variety as you can so that you don't get bored of eating the same thing each day. This can be as simple as switching up your spices or protein (e.g. swapping your chicken for fish) every few days.

### **Time**

As I mentioned before, if you are new to the meal prep concept I would recommend preparing a few days' meals at a time. How much time that you dedicate to this is completely up to you!

You can choose to dedicate a whole day to this or spread it out nightly. Personally, I prefer to take a few hours out of my Sunday night just so it is done and out of the way. How much prep I actually do will also depend on what it is I am actually preparing. For example, if there are meals/snacks that I like to eat fresh, such as a salad or veggie sticks, then I just group them in the same containers in the fridge and chop them up the morning of or just before I eat it. For more complex dishes, like stir fry's, I will often chop all the veggies up so that they are ready to go when it's time to cook. It is SUPER important to write down a clear plan and do what works for you.

### **Cooking**

The point of meal prep is to make life easier for you during the week; this doesn't mean you have to precook all of your food though! For example, you can marinate your chicken breasts, place them in the freezer, and defrost when you're ready to use them. The same thing applies to homemade turkey burgers etc. Another example is to make one larger batch of your favorite sauces and refrigerate it, rather than make several smaller batches. If you like your vegetables freshly cooked, then you can portion them out for each meal and put them in containers ready to be steamed or cooked. If you know you will be making a meal that requires a lot of chopping, you can do this in advance as well. You can also wash all fruit that you will be using as snacks, so that you can easily eat them on the run. When it comes to cooking your good carbohydrates such as quinoa, brown rice, and whole meal pasta, I recommend cooking these upfront as these do take a little longer to prepare.

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