

BECOME A MEAL PLANNER

► Meal planning isn't just for the über organized. No matter your shopping or cooking style, these smart strategies will help you save money (up to \$185 per week), limit food waste, and eat well all week long.

WE'LL PLAN FOR YOU

Each Sunday, we publish a week of healthy menus to help you plan for the week ahead. Head to cookinglight.com/sundaystrategist, or try the drag-and-drop meal planner at cookinglight.com/weeknight-meal-planner.



I'LL MAKE AHEAD PLANNER



DIAGNOSIS

A true weekend warrior, you cook on Sunday for the week ahead. While leftovers aren't a big deal, they can get a bit boring. By Friday, you're stuck with odds and ends of recipes that don't really have a home, so they end up getting tossed.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. Stagger meals:** Instead of soldiering through a double batch every night, stagger a couple of favorite recipes during the week to avoid back-to-back repeats.
- 2. Embrace "kitchen sink" dishes:** Stir-fries, frittatas, loaded baked potatoes, pasta bakes, and spinach salads can revamp leftovers with little effort.
- 3. Know what can be revived:** Saucy items (stews, chilis, marinara) and layered items (meat loaf, casseroles) hold up well to freezing and reheating.
- 4. And what can't:** Plain cooked pastas and rice can be gummy or gritty; cooked proteins can overcook or dry out when reheated alone. Better to revamp these.



I HATE LEFTOVERS PLANNER



DIAGNOSIS

You like to plan ahead but don't want dinner déjà vu. Recipes go half eaten, and meals become a strange mashup—a scoop of chicken curry, some avocado, a cheese stick—not unlike your preschooler's plate.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. Be honest:** You may have the best intentions to cook recipes ahead, but if you know that last night's dinner won't be appealing come mealtime, it'll be a waste.
- 2. Prep components, not meals:** Cook and store items that can be combined differently during the week, from rock star toppers like caramelized onions and roasted tomatoes to basics like cooked wheat berries and fresh chopped, stemmed kale.
- 3. Shake up your proteins:** Try a little crisped bacon, prosciutto, or cured chorizo instead of a centerpiece protein. Eggs should also be part of your weeknight rotation.
- 4. Shake up your starches:** Break up the classic combos (sauce and pasta, stir-fry and rice, steak and potatoes) and try something new: spaghetti squash, cauliflower "rice," or quick-cooking lentils.



I'LL WING IT (NON-) PLANNER



DIAGNOSIS

You let your culinary mood inspire dinner daily. Store cashiers know you by name (you pop in for this or that several times a week). Your fridge and pantry are full of forgotten items that you'll need to purge soon to make room for more.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. Play "use it or lose it":** If you can't think of at least three reasonable uses for an ingredient at the store, put it back on the shelf.
- 2. Shop less:** More trips mean impulse buys and wasted food. Challenge yourself to go less, or pick up just one or two ingredients and make a meal with what you have.
- 3. Stock your pantry:** Keep building-block items such as unsalted canned beans, canned whole tomatoes, and quick-cooking whole grains like quinoa and farro on hand as the base for any meal.
- 4. Stock your fridge:** Fresh ingredients like parsley, lemon, shallots, and Parmesan make any dish sing. Add a pantry staple and a main ingredient, and dinner is done.