

K-State Research and Extension Southwind District
Family Consumer Science News Column
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What's for Dinner?

After a long day at work, the last thing many people want to do is cook dinner. The average person spends thirty minutes a day or more trying to figure out what to eat for dinner. However, meal planning ahead can reduce stress, stretch food dollars, and encourage nutritious meals.

The hardest part of planning a menu is taking the time to do it. It works best when you schedule a time each week just for menu planning. Some people like to plan their menus the day before they go grocery shopping; some schedule around payday; others around the ads that come in the newspaper; some do it when the house is quiet; and others want everyone home so they can give input to what goes on the menu.

Creating a budget for food will help keep you on track. To figure out your monthly budget, look back at how much you have spent on food in the past for a starting point. Remember to include all SNAP and WIC benefits into the budget, too. Consider foods you grow in a garden, garden foods given to you, food pantries, commodities, or any other food distribution programs. The goal is to stretch your food dollars to have enough nutritious food to eat all month long.

If you shop once a week, divide your monthly food dollars into four portions. If most of the shopping is done once per month, make sure to budget part of the food dollars for items that you will need to purchase later in the month.

It is smart to plan your menu around foods you already have on hand. This helps you save money and avoid wasting food you already have. As you plan, also choose a variety of meals that include favorites, budget stretchers, and quick-fix meals.

When the plan is in place and you have all the ingredients you need to create a fast, easy, delicious, and nutritious meal, you may find you actually like to cook!

Resources: Make a Meal from What's on Hand publication
<https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3534.pdf>

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