

MEAL PREP MANUAL

time management & financial strategies for the busy college student



When talking about **MEAL PREP**, there is often an assumption that you must make and store enough meals to get you through a select period of time (a week, sometimes even a month). However, this type of preparation requires a significant amount of prep time, planning, food storage capacity, and often leads to burnout. While some find that method helpful (more power to you), many college students find it not feasible, given their schedules.

HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF WITH EASY, HEALTHY FOOD STAPLES WITHOUT SACRIFICING MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF TIME OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES.

TIME MANAGEMENT & FOOD

As a student, you may be less likely to spend time creating healthier, higher-quality meals due to your schedule. Class, study sessions, work, exercise, social life, family life, sleep... they all contribute to a busy lifestyle. When people become overwhelmed, one of the first things to be sacrificed is food quality.

FINANCES & FOOD

Not only does a lack of time contribute to a sacrifice of food quality, but so do finances. Food costs money, and now, in 2026, food costs continue to rise.

What can be done?

CHOOSE FOOD COMPONENTS THAT ARE LOW-COST, EASY TO PUT TOGETHER (OR REQUIRE NO COOKING), AND HAVE THE NUTRIENTS THAT YOU NEED TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BODY AND MIND.

Below are some practical tips to help you do just that:

GROCERY LIST:

PROTEIN:

- Tuna and/or salmon, canned or packaged
- Other tinned fish (sardines and mackerel)
- Eggs (can be cooked in a microwave, see recipe later on)
- Beans and/or lentils, canned or packaged (heat-and-eat packages can be expensive, but you may find deals. Canned beans can be heated in a microwave-safe bowl).
- Yogurt and/or cottage cheese

FRUITS & VEGGIES:

- Frozen broccoli, green beans, or peas (microwavable bag)
- Frozen spinach, kale, or cut okra (great for smoothies)
- Tomato paste (can be added to beans, eggs, or fish)
- Baby carrots
- Frozen berries and other fruits (thaw in the fridge for use in yogurt or cottage cheese, or add to smoothies)
- Bananas, apples, and other fresh fruit can often be found in reduced-price sections at grocery stores

GROCERY LIST CONTINUED:

GRAINS:

- Instant oatmeal
- Heat-and-eat rice noodles
- Whole-grain or sourdough bread - many bakeries offer "day-old" or "yesterday's fresh" bread at a reduced price, even at bakeries inside of grocery stores.

HEALTHY FATS:

- Nuts/ nut butters
- Chia seeds - these can be added to your smoothies or yogurt/cottage cheese for extra healthy fats and fiber. You can get it in bulk for much cheaper, too.
- Canned fish - fish contains lots of healthy fats, especially when stored in cans with olive oil
- Eggs with the yolk - egg yolks contain both healthy fats and lots of vitamins and minerals.



HELPFUL TIPS:

- Utilize the bulk section of the grocery store. You'd be surprised how many things you already buy that you can get for much cheaper in that section.
- Utilize the reduced price section, and don't be afraid to ask the baker, butcher, or fruit grocer for reduced price items from the previous day!
- Utilize the Student Nutrition Access Center (SNAC) - USU's food pantry for students! Learn more at <https://qanr.usu.edu/ndfs/snac/>
- Utilize community food pantries. Food banks are not just for the homeless or otherwise poor communities... they are for anyone who needs a little help with getting enough food.
- Find local farms and ask when and where they sell their produce and other items for a reduced price.

RECIPES & OTHER MEAL SUGGESTIONS:



MICROWAVE POACHED EGGS:

- Crack one or two eggs in a bowl of water and cover with a microwave-safe plate
- Microwave for one minute and check. You may decide to continue cooking if the egg is too runny.
- Scoop the poached egg out of the bowl with a spoon. Season with salt and pepper or as desired.
- Best served on a slice of bread or over noodles or rice.



FRUIT, VEGGIE, AND PROTEIN SMOOTHIE:

- In a blender, add:
 - Half a cup of frozen fruit of choice
 - A quarter cup of frozen spinach or other frozen veggie of choice
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of yogurt or cottage cheese
 - A half cup of water, milk, or milk alternative
 - Optional: honey or other sweetener to taste
- Blend until smooth



NUTRIENT-DENSE NOODLE OR RAMEN BOWL:

- Cook your heat-and-eat rice noodles or ramen according to the package instructions
- Add frozen spinach, frozen peas, and frozen cut carrots (or some combo of veggies) and heat again.
- Season to taste
- Make a few microwave-poached eggs according to the instructions in the recipe above, and place them on top of your meal.
- Optional: top with hot sauce and sesame seeds

GROCERY SHOPPING AS MEAL PREP

works best when you know how to build a plate. Below are some steps to building a plate with the food components on the grocery list given previously:

1. START WITH A PROTEIN AND A VEGGIE.

Choose complementary protein and veggies from your pantry. For example, tuna with a spoonful of yogurt and diced cucumber can be combined for a fresh tuna salad.

2. ADD A GRAIN AND/OR A HEALTHY FAT

You could put your tuna salad on a piece of whole-wheat, sprouted, or sourdough toast for your grain, and add some avocado, olive oil, or a fried egg on top for your fat.

THAT'S IT!

This can be done with anything you have on hand.

Just ask yourself:

Where are my protein and vegetables?

Where are my whole grains and fats?

Give yourself grace - not every food component has to accompany every meal. However, if you have lots of easy foods to grab and throw together, like from the meal prep grocery list, it will be a lot easier!

