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Organize Yourself For A Healthy Lifestyle

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Knowing how to make great choices is essential for lasting lifestyle change. Putting those choices into practice day in and out is really the backbone of health. Sometimes the hard part seems to be maintaining the great choices. You know what to do — sometimes it's just hard to do it!

For example, you know you should pack lunch for work to save calories, fat, sodium and money, but, the fridge is empty, you're running late and you don't have any more sandwich bags. Instead, you bring a few extra bucks to work, skip breakfast and have a HUGE lunch. Tired and dragging around for the rest of the day, you skip your exercise routine after work, and so it goes. Before you even realize it, you're out of a healthful lifestyle routine.

How does this happen, especially when you *know* how to make better choices? It all starts with organization. If you stick to a plan (yet build in some degree of flexibility), you'll be able to carry out your health strategy more consistently.

Mapping Out Your Schedule

What does your week look like? Are you always pressed for time? The best way to really know how busy you are is to map it out on a calendar. This will help you to recognize times that in general may be more flexible for you to fit in grocery shopping and exercise. If you have healthy groceries in your house, you'll be able to eat well. If you prioritize exercise into your weekly schedule, you'll get in that workout. Putting things down on paper or into a personal digital assistant (PDA) helps you to do it.

Go ahead. Look to the week ahead. Print out this page and jot down a sample schedule.

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Morning

Midday

Afternoon

Night

Major
events

Other

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Inventory Check: Creating a Grocery List

Now you've identified some times that are better than others for getting to the grocery store. The next step is to create a grocery list that you can use each week to help organize your choices. It may be helpful to make your grocery list according to how your grocery store is set up. Set specific goals right on your list. Once again, this is something that you can put into a PDA.

Don't forget the most important rule: *Never grocery shop when you are hungry!* Have a small snack on your way out the door. It will save you money and help you to resist buying tempting treats.

Here are guidelines for a sample grocery list to help get you started:

- **Fresh fruit** — Eat at least two fruits each day. Variety is the spice of life! Buy at least three different fruits each week.
- **Grains** — Look for “whole” grain products with at least 3 grams of fiber and less than 5 grams of sugar per serving.
- **Nuts and seeds** — Try a few nuts and seeds as snacks or on top of salads or casseroles. Calories do add up so keep the portion small (no bigger than a flat handful).
- **Fish** — Eat fish at least two times each week.
- **Poultry** — Aim for skinless.
- **Meat** — Eat red meat only about once a week.
- **Dairy** — Eat small amounts of low-fat dairy each day.
- **Vegetables** — Eat at least five servings of vegetables each day (a serving is ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw) . Buy at least five different vegetables each week and aim for a variety of colors.
- **Tubers and legumes** — Aim for beans (black, white, garbanzo, lentils), yams, parsnips, turnips and colorful potatoes.
- **Soy** — Look for soy milk, tofu or tempeh, and vegetarian burger or breakfast patties.

- **Oils and seasonings** — Try a variety of healthy oils (olive, canola, peanut, walnut), herbs, spices and sodium-free seasonings.
- **Frozen foods** — Buy plenty of frozen fruits and vegetables to keep on hand. Next to fresh, they're best.
- **Staples** — Look for low-sodium versions of your favorite canned soups.

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You Have the Groceries. What Next?

Great. You have your grocery list planned and shopping is a snap. Now the challenge is turning ingredients into meals at the end of a long workday, when you're hungry. Sit down and list your favorite meals- from childhood, friends, a cooking show, magazine or newspaper recipe. Interview family members to remind yourself of their favorites that deserve to be in the regular meal cycle. It won't take you long to make a list of 10 to 15 meals- enhanced by vegetable side dishes. That's almost a three-week menu cycle, and planning it didn't take a lot of effort. Knowing the ingredients needed for these meals will help you to streamline shopping and planning.

Some examples:

- Chicken stir fry (chicken breast, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, snap peas, olive oil, garlic, lite soy sauce)
- Breaded fish (white fish, bread crumbs, milk, egg, olive oil)
- Chili (extra lean ground beef or ground turkey, kidney beans, fresh tomatoes or tomato paste, chili powder, cumin)
- Salmon croquettes (canned salmon, onions, frozen spinach, bread crumbs, olive oil)

A list of proven meals like this can help you make a grocery list, or can give you ideas about what to make with a handful of ingredients in the cupboard. And if you have a good source of new recipes, keep adding those that are tested and loved.

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Join or Begin a Dinner Club

Another fun way to get organized about healthful eating is to join (or start) a dinner club. Look for a small group of friends who also are interested in good food, as well as good conversation. Many groups meet once a month and rotate the host. To keep costs reasonable, it helps to have different people bring different items, similar to a potluck dinner. Scheduling the group once a month for several months in advance helps people to commit. Once again, this can be another way to keep your healthful eating on track by enlisting the ongoing support of others.

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