



Meal Prep & Batch Cooking Guide

*6 Steps to save you time,
energy and money in the kitchen*

by Emilia Skrzypek, Holistic Nutritional Therapist



Meal planning

When it comes to nutrition, even if we know what to eat, we don't always know how to actually make it a part of our everyday living.

With the busy lifestyles that we all have, it's common that nutrition falls down to the bottom of the to-do list. When we have little time for anything, cooking can seem like a time-consuming, onerous task.

If you appreciate how eating regular, nutritious meals impacts your mood, energy levels and body shape, then why not make shopping & cooking an easier, more enjoyable and effective process?

After over 7 years of working with clients, I consider meal planning as the foundation to healthy eating and it's a habit that you can learn for life!

Follow my 6-Step Meal Prep & Batch Cooking Guide and regain your energy levels and the joy of cooking and eating healthily!

By creating some structure around your meals, you will soon:

- diminish the need to think about what to eat,
- ensure your meals are regular, healthy and varied,
- reduce the cravings for snacks and comfort foods,
- shorten and optimise the time spent in the kitchen,
- reduce your grocery bill,
- minimise food wastage.

Just imagine what your life will look like when you will have a rough plan of meals, all ingredients on hand and some dinner ingredients prepared in the fridge.

Meal Prep & Batch Cooking Guide





Dive deep

Are you ready to turn the advice into life-long habits? Then join me and fellow participants in the next edition of my 'Meal Prep and Batch Cooking Online Programme'. This programme empowers busy individuals and parents to overcome challenges like lack of time, energy and meal ideas. During those 6 weeks together, you will gain the tools and support needed to effortlessly plan and prepare delicious meals for the week ahead, and feel motivated, energetic, and enjoy the benefits of a nourishing lifestyle.

Scan the code or follow the link to find out more:

<https://youoptimumnutrition.co.uk/services/meal-prep-and-batch-cooking/>



Please note

This ebook is to serve you as a general guide and is not intended to give you medical or therapeutic advice. I hope you will find some useful resources and use your own judgement to know which ones are not suitable for you. If you have any questions or would like to work together to adjust the advice to your personal health history and goals, please get in touch with me and we can discuss this in more detail.

www.youoptimumnutrition.co.uk/contact



About Me

Nice to meet you, I'm Emilia Skrzypek, a Holistic Nutritional Therapist.

I established Your Optimum Nutrition in 2016, soon after I qualified from the MSc Nutritional Therapy course from the University of Worcester.

Since then, I've been passionate about helping people regain their **confidence, energy, and zest for life** so that they can look and feel great!

I'm also a mum and I know how busy life can get, especially when you are juggling work and family-life. That's why I believe in taking **small steps** – they all add up. A 10-minute walk, a solo dance-party, or even sitting in silence can do wonders to how we feel.

One of the first things I work on with clients is helping them realise there is no such thing as

'perfect', before **implementing systems to help them find joy in cooking and eating in a way that blends into their individual daily routine.**

I understand that **knowledge doesn't always translate into habits**, and sometimes, you need a little extra help. That's why I created this Meal Prep & Batch Cooking Guide to empower you to make better food choices and take charge of your health.

"Good health and nutrition are like riverbanks – by holding the water gently, they allow it to flow freely."



STEP 1

Weekly schedule

Start by drawing a **weekly schedule for either yourself or the whole family** – think about work, study or other commitments, where you will be, what time you will leave/come back home etc.

Then, roughly mark your meal times, e.g. breakfast (at work or before?), lunch (working from home or at the office?), dinner (what is the earliest you can eat it?). Of course, the meal times may vary slightly depending on the day but try to stick to them as much as you can to **establish a routine**.

It's especially important to mark time for lunch break as this meal is often skipped when we're busy at work. Lunch is one of the most important meals of the day as the energy derived from it

will fuel your activities for the rest of the day and help you avoid the mid-afternoon energy crisis.

Now assign one day a week for **meal planning and shopping**. I often shop online so combine the two tasks in one go, but if you tend to visit supermarkets, you may choose to plan your meals the day before.

Once you get used to these new habits, you may also wish to include a **weekly batch cooking session** in your calendar to further streamline the meal prep.



STEP 2

Recipe database

Now that you have a good idea of what the upcoming week will look like, it's time to pick what to eat.

I encourage you to spend a couple of hours on building your own **database of recipes and meal ideas**. Some people like to keep all recipes printed in a folder, some prefer bookmarking them on their phones or tablets. There are also several phone apps that you may find useful, such as MealBoard, Stashcook and Paprika. They allow you to save recipes from websites and cookbooks, create meal plans and shopping lists which is very helpful. Find a method that works for you and keep all of the favourite recipes in one place.

Please note: Once you do this initial work, you will have a database to reach for weekly to simplify the process of meal planning. It may seem a bit onerous now but you can also break it down into several steps, e.g. start by one or two cookbooks/blogs a week.

Start by producing a **list of meals that you have tried and tested** and you know will be easy for you to make. This could be anything from a Shepherd's pie to roasted salmon, rice & steamed broccoli. You can break down the list into 'breakfast', 'main meal' & 'soup' or 'breakfast', 'lunch' & 'dinner', as well 'vegetable side dishes' and favourite 'desserts'.

You can also use a **food and observations diary** as a source of meal inspirations – browsing through the past records may bring your attention to meals you haven't had for a long time. Maybe consider setting up a Pinterest or Instagram profile where you could post your own pictures of favourite meals?

Then, go through the **cookbooks** that you have at home and, using post-it notes as bookmarks, mark the ones you have done in the past and add to the previous list. Then mark the recipes you'd fancy to try. To make it even easier for the future, add a reference to a book and a page number or take a picture of the recipe and upload to your phone/Pinterest.

You can also browse through many **'foodie' websites, blogs or Instagram/Pinterest accounts** and bookmark, take a screenshot or print recipes from them.

Then, you can set yourself a realistic goal for how many new dishes you are willing to try each week – most clients find that one is enough, as cooking from a new recipe takes a little bit more time. Perhaps one recipe every fortnight is enough for you to start with. Just remember that in 6 months'-time you will try 12 new recipes and hopefully some of them will be incorporated into your everyday repertoire.

Please note: Head over to the last section of this ebook for my personal cookbook, blogs & food apps recommendations.

Finally, add to the database all the **ready-made or take-away meals** that you can include in the weekly meal planner. They could be frozen meals from Cook, Waitrose, Lidl, Cobbs Farm Shop or other shops, your own meals that you have made in batches and froze, or local take-away shops/restaurants that you know provide reasonably healthy meals.

For meal inspirations, visit my Instagram or Pinterest profiles:

[Instagram.com/youroptimumnutrition](https://www.instagram.com/youroptimumnutrition)
[pinterest.co.uk/youroptimumnutrition](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/youroptimumnutrition)



STEP 3

Meal planner

Take a sheet of A4 paper and draw the columns as per template below or use your chosen app to create separate folders.

Plan a couple of lunches and dinners and list several breakfast ideas, leaving space for change & spontaneous choices. The additional purpose of meal planning is to make double portions of each main meal so that you can **save time in the kitchen** or make extra portions to **store for later**.

Your meal planner can include:

- **3-4 main meal ideas** – that can include various sources of a protein to ensure variety such as fish, meat & pulses (adjusted to your personal needs/preferences).
- **1-2 lunch/soup ideas** – soup is a great way to deliver hydration and increase consumption of vegetables so I like to recommend it as a part of lunch. If you eat lunch at work, think of the options that can be eaten at room temperature or easily reheated.
- **2-3 Breakfast ideas** – you can stick to the same breakfast Mon-Fri and have 2 other options for the weekend. It is generally a good idea to eat a warm breakfast as often as you can.
- **2 side dish vegetable ideas** – perhaps you'd like to use the 'Balanced Plate' graphic on page 12 as an inspiration to include veg that you don't consume too often?
- **Any other dishes** – such as a pudding, granola, hummus or special meal to celebrate birthday.

Tip: At the beginning of this journey, you can make plans for one meal at a time, e.g. focus on breakfasts for the first couple of weeks before you move on to another meal. Break it down into steps and it'll be easier with each time!

There is no need to decide on when exactly you are going to have these meals. This way you'll have the **freedom of changing meals around** if life gets in the way (e.g., you come home later than you thought and you'll reach for the planned ready-made meal) or if, on a given day, you have fancy a particular dish (e.g., it's cold and you really feel like eating the stew).

Tip: Include meals that can be made using frozen ingredients, such as green beans, diced sweet potatoes or chopped onion. This way you can save time on preparing the veg!

Another benefit of doing the meal planner as a template is that it allows space for improvisation and using up the leftovers towards the end of the week. This is a great way of **saving money and reducing wastage**.

Please note: The goal is to create 3-4 planners that you will eventually use on a rotational basis for several months. You may then wish to re-write one or two to bring some new dishes to the menu, e.g. when the seasons change, when you modify working patterns or go on holidays.



Step 4

Shopping list

If using a manual version of the meal planner, hang it on the fridge door or kitchen wall to stay on track. You are now ready to write a **weekly shopping list**, so once in the supermarket/doing online shopping, you know exactly what to purchase and avoid buying the things you don't need. This way your shopping escapade will be **quick, easy and will save you money**.

Tip: Don't go shopping when you're hungry or tired – it will be much harder for you to stick to your shopping list and avoid the temptations!

To make the list, simply use a pen and paper, Google Keep or the chosen meal planning app (they can be shared with others and updates automatically). You may wish to divide the list by shops (e.g. one for farmers' market, one for online shopping and one for butcher's) and, further, by food categories (such as dairy, fish, fruit and vegetables etc.).

Tip: at home, we always have one shopping list hanging on the fridge door and we add to it as we go along during the week – e.g., I make a note when I take the last block of butter or spotted that we're running low on soya sauce.

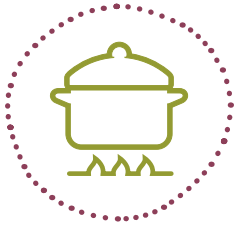
Now check your shopping list against what you already have at home to use what's there and avoid buying more products than you need.

Be creative – can you use the opened tin of chopped tomatoes instead of buying passata? Can you replace feta cheese for goat's cheese that's in the fridge?

Once you get used to creating shopping lists according to your meal planner, you can then create one **shopping list for the 'staple' products** – such as olive oil, milk, tinned tomatoes, coconut milk, lemons etc. You can quickly check your cupboards against these and add to the shopping list if needed.

By the way, I am a big advocate of **online shopping** as it saves me time and energy (mainly because I don't enjoy going to the supermarkets or shopping centres, especially with a child). It is also much easier for me to compare products' prices by weight, look out for promotions and repeat ordering favourite products. However, I much more prefer to buy local, seasonal veg and so I tend to visit local farmers' market once a week. Consider which way of shopping works best for you.

Please note: If you particularly enjoy going to the shops and you get meal ideas from just looking at the products on the shelves, make a note of them and use for the next weeks' planner.



STEP 5

Batch cooking

Now that you have a meal planner and all the ingredients at hand, it's time to get cooking!

The reason why you only have 3-4 meal ideas on your planner is because I strongly encourage you to **cook double (or even triple!) portions** of each meal. That way, you can do the work once and enjoy the same meal for two consecutive days, which can be especially handy if you come home from work late. Early dinners are key in supporting our digestive health so the quicker you can assemble a meal, the better. You can also portion out and freeze some of your meals for the upcoming weeks, this way you will have some meals ready for 'the rainy days'.

Tip: Not all of the meals taste as good when reheated, so you can prep the ingredients for a double portion and therefore halve the cooking time the following day. E.g., chop up all the vegetables for a stir-fry, marinate the meat and mix the spices/sauce ingredients.

The other advice I can share is to introduce a **weekly batch cooking session** during which you maximise the time in the kitchen by preparing several ingredients and parts of the meal that you will reach for during the week. Some of the ideas include (pick approx. 3-4 unless you're on an absolute cooking bonanza!):

- Cook grains, such as rice, quinoa, millet
- Roast a tray of root vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips, butternut squash or beetroot
- Steam or parboil vegetables such as broccoli, pak choi, garden peas, green beans etc. (leave them crunchy)
- Make a dressing to drizzle over cooked vegetables or add to a salad
- Make Spanish omelette, quiche or tart that can serve as a take-away lunch

- Make a soup or a stock/broth to serve as a base for soups
- Marinate chicken/beef/fish for pan-frying or roasting the next day
- Boil a couple of eggs
- Roast beef, lamb or chicken and divide into smaller portions
- Make a one-pot dish such as curry, chilli or stew
- Make a big batch of porridge
- Roast granola for porridge
- Make a tray of muffins or batch of energy balls

Meal planning, shopping and batch cooking sessions can be great opportunities for you to **involve other family members**. From my experience, this can be especially helpful in families where children are 'picky eaters' or 'moan' about the meals that you prepare for them (and it could be a topic for a separate ebook!). A couple of hours spent together in the kitchen can serve as a family-bonding experience, may help you share the workload with others whilst empowering kids to be more independent. The final benefit of batch cooking sessions is that you only have to do the washing up once!

Tip: Get hold of food storage containers and zip bags to freeze leftover meals (e.g., one portion of chilli con carne or curry) and to store leftover vegetables (e.g., chop the leek or pepper that's been sitting at the bottom of the vegetable shelf). Be sure to stick a label on them before freezing!



STEP 6

Fine-tuning the meal planner

As for now, we haven't been paying too much attention to the actual meals in your planner but rather focused on **creating habits** that will serve as a great foundation for any further work that may be required.

After implementing previous steps, you should now be able to benefit from introducing more variety of different protein-rich foods, sources of carbohydrates as well as including more vegetables. Now that you have established a routine around meal planning, shopping and cooking, you may wish to fine-tune what's actually on your plate.

Using the 'balanced plate' as a guide, the basic template for a highly nutritious meal can be made of:

- a **grain or root vegetable** of your choice, be it Basmati rice, quinoa, oats or baked sweet potato,
- a **protein component**, such as falafels, lentils, eggs, dairy, beef or fish,
- **high quality fats**, e.g., olive oil, avocado, hemp oil, coconut oil, sesame seeds,
- **plenty of vegetables**, mixed into the dish as in soup or served as an accompaniment.

However, this template is rather difficult (or even impossible) to achieve with each and every meal. Therefore, it should serve you as a **guide for your meal planner** – try to achieve a good balance of all food groups **in a week** rather than at each meal.

Moreover, depending on your health concerns, symptoms and preferences, you may need to adjust the 'balanced plate' template to suit your individual needs, e.g., separate carbohydrates from proteins at dinner time, remove animal-derived products or eliminate dairy.

For optimum nutrition, you may also choose to add:

- a serving of **fermented foods or drinks** each or every other day,
- a dedicated serving of **nuts & seeds**,
- wilted sprouts,
- increased amounts of various food groups or ingredients with **specific benefits**, e.g. anti-inflammatory or rich in iron.

Balanced Plate

VEGETABLES:

Tomatoes, radishes, red pepper, beetroot, chilli peppers, orange peppers, pumpkin, butternut squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, sweetcorn, yellow peppers, yellow carrots, turmeric, ginger, asparagus, green beans, broad beans, peas, runner beans, avocado, green peppers, sprouts, broccoli, brussels sprouts, savoy cabbage, cavolo nero, kale, spinach, rocket, watercress, spring greens, lettuce, green olives, courgettes, green chillies, romanesco, cauliflower, cucumber, celery, marrow, fennel, chard, purple sprouting broccoli, purple kale, aubergines, red onion, red cabbage, garlic, brown onion, leeks, cauliflower, turnip, celeriac, white cabbage, parsnip, mushrooms, chestnuts, chicory.

HERBS AND SPICES:

Star anise, caraway, cinnamon, basil, lemon balm, tarragon, marjoram, rosemary, thyme, saffron, smoked paprika, sweet paprika, oregano, turmeric, curry, mustard seeds, nigella seed, nutmeg, ginger, coriander, bay leaf, chilli flakes, allspice, pepper, cardamom, cumin, clove, fennel seeds, liquorice root, dill, parsley, mint, sage.

GRAINS:

Rice - basmati, red, black, brown, wild, arborio, sushi; quinoa, buckwheat, pear barley, millet, oats.

FLOURS:

Coconut, buckwheat, wheat, rice, rye, millet, cornflour.

NOODLES & PASTA:

Soba, udon, rice, egg, pea, soya, wholemeal pasta, egg pasta, couscous.

STARCHY VEG:

Potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam, cassava, pumpkin & squash, parsnip, celeriac.

LEGUMES:

Lentils - puy, green, red, brown; chickpeas, kidney beans, cannellini beans, white beans, dhal, mung beans, soya beans, baked beans, peas.



FRUIT IN SEASON:

Red apples, cherries, pomegranate, strawberries, raspberries, redcurrants, blood orange, grapefruit, rhubarb, peaches, apricots, melons, orange, satsumas, mango, khaki, nectarines, passion fruit, lemons, bananas, pineapples, kiwi, grapes, green apples, gooseberries, limes, black grapes, blueberries, bilberries, blackberries, plums, blackcurrants, figs, pears, coconut.

FERMENTED FOODS & DRINKS

Kefir & natural yoghurt (dairy and non-dairy), sauerkraut, sour cucumbers, pickled vegetables, kimchi, sourdough bread, miso paste, nato, kombucha.

NUTS AND SEEDS:

Almonds, walnuts, cashews, brazil nuts, pecan, pistachios, pine nuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, flaxseeds, sesame seeds, nut butters, tahini.

UNSAT. FATS (OILS):

Hemp, flaxseed, olive oil, walnut oil, avocado oil, rapeseed oil, sesame oil.

SAT. FATS:

Coconut oil, butter, clarified butter (ghee).

OILY FISH

MEAT & POULTRY:

Beef, lamb, organ meat (kidneys, hearts), pork, turkey, pheasant, chicken, quail, rabbit, duck, game.

OILY FISH:

Mackerel, sardines & sprats, anchovies, wild salmon, tuna, trout, sea bass, sea bream, herring, turbot.

WHITE FISH & SHELLFISH:

Cod, haddock, hake, plaice, sole, prawns, oysters, clams, crab, lobster, mussels, langoustines, squid, octopus, scallops.

EGGS & DAIRY:

Eggs, cow's milk, goat's milk, feta, cheddar, halloumi, yoghurt, kefir, cream, milk alternative products.

BONUS 1

Recipes & meal inspirations

Here are some of my favourite cookbooks:

- 'My New Roots' by Sarah Britton,
- 'Plenty More' by Yotam Ottolenghi, as well as any other of his books,
- 'Deliciously Ella' by Ella Woodward,
- 'Good and Simple' by Melissa and Jasmine Hemsley,
- 'Eat Happy' by Melissa Hemsley,
- 'Cook. Nourish. Glow' by Amelia Freer,
- 'Fish and Shellfish', 'From Venice to Istanbul' and 'Long Weekends' by Rick Stein,
- 'Jamie's 30-minute Meals' by Jamie Oliver,
- Waitrose Magazine,
- 'River Cottage Cookbook' and 'River Cottage Everyday' by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall,
- 'Healing Foods' by Neils Yard Remedies.

Some of my favourite websites, blogs & recipe apps:

- Grow:
<https://mynewrootsgrow.life/your-optimum-nutrition-landing-page>
Online platform with recipes, cooking videos and live demo sessions as well as a section on movement, gardening and natural skincare. Created by the founder of My New Roots Grow. Enjoy my membership discount when purchased through the link above!
- My New Roots:
<https://www.mynewroots.org/site>
- Feel Better App by Deliciously Ella:
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/feel-better-deliciously-ella/id1445510165>
Lots of plant-based recipes and meal plans as well as breathwork, yoga, pilates and mindfulness videos.
- Hemsley and Hemsley:
<http://www.hemsleyandhemsley.com>
- Elana's Pantry:
<https://elanaspantry.com>
- Green Kitchen Stories:
<http://www.greenkitchenstories.com>
- Food Pharmacy:
<https://foodpharmacy.blog>
- Abel and Cole:
<https://www.abelandcole.co.uk/recipes>
- Riverford:
<https://www.riverford.co.uk/recipes>
- BBC Good Food:
<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com>



BONUS 2

Waste not!

Here are my top tips on buying & storing food to reduce wastage:

- Buy smaller amounts/packs of foods that easily wilt or spoil, such as rocket, spinach, lettuce. Leftover spinach and kale can be frozen and added to a soup, stew or curry.
- Wash salad leaves after buying by plunging them into a sink full of cold water and swirling around a couple of times. The sand, dirt and other debris will settle at the bottom and the leaves can be picked up from the surface. Pat-dry them on a kitchen cloth and store in an air-tight container in the fridge covered lined up with kitchen paper to absorb moisture.
- Keep fresh herbs in a glass of water in the fridge, like flowers.
- Freeze leftover herbs, such as parsley, coriander or dill, by chopping them up and placing in a freezer bag or small tub.
- Follow the same advice for small fruit, such as blueberries, strawberries, raspberries or sliced bananas – they can be added to a simmering porridge or as a base for smoothie.
- Transfer yoghurt and cream to sealed jars or tubs – they will last for a few days longer when they have less contact with the air.
- Fruit, avocados, potatoes, onions, garlic and tomatoes are best kept in a basket or box in a shade or pantry.



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with Your Optimum Nutrition

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2023