

DO THIS BEFORE YOUR MEAL PLAN

STEP 1 PREP FRUIT

Here's the truth. You've got to prep fruit or have fruit on hand that's ready to go.

If you don't want to cut fruit like mangos and pineapples, then buy it already chopped.

You can also opt for "convenience fruit." Pears, apples, clementine/mandarins, even berries: these all work great and require basically no prep except a quick rinse.

And, of course, there is the beloved banana; it's cheap, easy, and quick to eat! It even comes in its own disposable wrapper!!! It fits so many needs. Spread some peanut butter on it and you have a well-rounded snack.

I'm going to keep the prep fruit info fast and sweet... like a piece of fruit.

Just keep the fruit bowl stocked.

And eat it.

Eat it when you're bored, when you're hungry, when you want something sweet... Fresh fruit is always a great thing to eat. Forget the person who told you fruit has too much sugar. You can eat fruit and feel good about it.

(With fruit, frozen is great option to keep on hand. You can eat them frozen as a snack. If you like to, you can defrost them and enjoy them with a "fruit cup" consistency, but without the added sugar. You can put them into smoothies or baked goods. And all frozen fruit is already cleaned and prepped! You can also throw fruit into the freezer if you are running out of time to eat it, but be sure to make a smoothie later!)

WEEK 1 CHALLENGE

Add a new fruit to the fruit bowl. And eat it!

This helped me find good alternatives to my current un-healthy go to foods and get me back on track to a healthy living/ eating/ snacking lifestyle. Thank you! ~Amber R.

STEP 2 CHOP VEGGIES

I honestly can't emphasize this step enough. For most people, it is the most important step for making your diet more healthful. Chop veggies! It's that simple.

Because once you buy them and chop them and have them ready to go in your fridge, you're going to find ways to use them.

And if the week is moving on and you haven't cooked them, then you serve them with a cup of your favorite salad dressing for dipping. It really is that simple. (Cucumbers, peppers, carrots, or celery are great for eating raw.)

Another very quick and easy to eat vegetables is to chop and roast them. Simply chop them into cubes (smaller cooks faster, and hard vegetables like potatoes take longer), toss them in a bowl with oil, lay them on a cookie sheet (line with parchment paper or foil for quick clean up), and put them in the oven on bake at 425F for about 25 minutes (give or take, depending on the size and type) until the edges all start to turn brown. These will go great with the bowl recipe you will look up next week. (Sweet potatoes, peppers, broccoli, or cauliflower are popular for roasting.)

When are you going to chop the veggies? You can schedule it in advance on your calendar if that works for you or you can just buy the veggies and commit to doing it within 48 hours.

(Oh, and if you really are ridiculously strapped for time, you can always buy fresh, pre-chopped veggies! It's ok to take short cuts! Imagine how fast you can toss together a stir fry or put soup in a crock pot if you have chopped veggies sitting in your fridge! You can also throw chopped veggies in the freezer if you run out of time in the week, but you can only do this once in a while, and then you have to make soup with them.)

You have to buy veggies, you have to chop them (or buy them chopped), and you have to eat them. Do this every week and you will improve your health.

Now I know how to prep all my vegetables, and I want to thank you for that tip. So, now I'm doing that, and it's really easy to have a salad in a couple minutes! ~Heather G.

WEEK 2 CHALLENGE

Buy more vegetables than whatever is your normal. Chop them, and use them.

Alegra helped me find delicious ways to include vegetables into my diet, blended into smoothies for breakfast, mixed in with grains, pureed into soups, but more than that, she helped me see food as a way to nourish myself. ~Leslie C.

STEP 3 COOK GRAINS

For some people, cooking grains can truly transform the quality of their diet.

- If you are relying on bread as a primary source of carbs or calories, you are one of these people.
- If you are buying your bread from the inside shelves of any grocery store, if your bread stays soft at room temperature for more than 12 hours, or if you are shopping the bakery section of most large chain groceries, you are one of these people.
- If you eat a lot of noodles or crackers or take out, you are one of these people.

The good news is that once you get in the habit of eating grains, they make simple, satisfying meals. Try any "Bowl" recipe to get yourself started!

Sometimes cooking grains feels like a LOT of work. While they can be time consuming, they are actually very simple.

Typically, you add 1 cup grains and 2 cups water to a pot (double check the exact ratio on the package), bring to boil, reduce to low, set timer (check the package, anywhere from 10-45 minutes), and then remove.

Because we sometimes have a mental barrier about how hard this actually is, I suggest doing it just once a week and choosing two different grains and cook them at the same time (in two different pots). Or even just double a batch of one type of grain so you have leftover cooked grains that make the next meal so much faster!

Either way, once you have your grains for the week, throwing together a super simple fast meal becomes a quick and easy task.

If you really don't know what the heck you would even make with whole grains, that's ok! Just think of ONE kind of grain you know you like. Brown rice is probably the most common, but some people are familiar with quinoa or barley.

WEEK 3 CHALLENGE

Experiment with finding the whole grain approach that works for you, by searching for a recipe with the key words "the grain you picked" and "easy bowl recipe."

I have been making progress as the matter of fact. Your comments really stuck about prepping and using up my ingredients. It really is a shift in the way I think about meal planning and makes things so much easier. ~Elizabeth R.