

4 Simple Steps for Meal Planning



It may be of no surprise, but I choose to go about my shopping and menu planning using a method a bit outside of the box. I am sharing it here because, like you, I've tried all sorts of variations on the theme of how-to-get-a-healthy-dinner-on-the-table-each-night-

without-ending-up-in-a-puddle-of-tears and found most of them lacking.

While this approach may seem a bit awkward at first, it is super efficient and allows for lots of creativity. Efficiency is a key word at our house and we're better with some things than others, but when it comes to shopping and eating, this process provides us with meals that meet both our health and efficiency standards which then allows us plenty of flex time for exercise and creative projects.

I mentioned here, that I shop twice a week: once to prep ahead for my four days seeing clients and once again for the weekend.

So, here is how my shop- and cook-ahead plan rolls:

1. These staples and fresh items are always on hand. I purchase them at Wheatsville or online at Soap.com

- Organic Olive, Coconut & Sesame Oils
- Pumpkin seeds; sunflower; pine nuts; hemp seeds; sprouted almonds; raw cashews; walnuts; nut butters; coconut flakes; assorted dried fruits
- honey; maple syrup
- Organic Quinoa, Brown Rice, Buckwheat Ramen Noodles

- Lentils
- Fresh citrus—lemons/limes/oranges
- Avocados

2. In a reverse order of most cooks, once at the store I survey the produce isle and choose four vegetable combinations that will star in each evening meal. While I may not settle on the exact prep method until I am home unpacking, I choose what looks freshest and most delicious.

Here are the pairings I selected this week:

- Broccoli and Dino Kale
- Rainbow Chard, Spinach and an assortment of Sweet Potatoes
- Asparagus and Sweet Peppers
- Roma Tomatoes, Sweet Onion, Basil, Carrots, Apples

3. Once home everything gets unpacked, laid out on the dining room table and I settle on the final menus, adjusting any pairings. This week I decided to stick with my original combinations and to make the following dinners:

- Raw Broccoli-Kale Salad with Pumpkin Seeds, Avocado and Cashew Tamari Dressing
- Sautéed Greens and Roasted Cubed Sweet Potatoes
- Quinoa Salad with Roasted Asparagus and Peppers and Toasted Pine Nuts
- Fresh Roasted Tomato Soup and Grated Carrot-Apple Salad

4. Now the whole family jumps in to help wash, chop and prep for the meal making.

I'll post more about the also slightly quirky details of my meal making process in the next few weeks.

How We Changed Our Input

Last August we returned from our summer travels in Europe and made some dramatic changes to how we fed and cared for our bodies. Twelve months later not only have we kept up the changes we made—I think we have even improved on them.



Why we did it

- With my growing practice and longer hours I had felt increasingly overwhelmed by the limited time I had to prepare healthy meals in the way I had done in previous years.
- We began to compensate by eating out or turning to more processed food items to save time.
- We struggled to free time for a daily family exercise program, we believed in since we lost 1-2 hours pre & post meal in the kitchen each evening.
- Joachim had just read Chris Crowley's, **Younger Next Year** and was motivated to get serious about exercise while I had read **The Raw Food Solution** by Mizpah Matus which came highly recommended by one of my mentors. Both books caught our attention and had us talking.
- With a preteen in the house we knew we only had a few limited years, if that, for him to experience a cleaner, healthier, and simpler approach that he may one day borrow from.
- Finally, and most significantly, was a week with my mentor Dr. Soescu in Romania where I was exposed first hand to a drastically simpler way to eat healthy. It was an approach she and colleagues practiced in her clinic and she carried out at home.

The changes we made

- Eliminated all dairy and packaged, processed foods other than bulk items such as rice, quinoa, millet, lentils, beans. (We already kept a gluten free and vegetarian kitchen.)
- Replaced our German-style fruit and muesli breakfast with raw fruit only smoothies, juices and/or whole fresh fruit.
- Added a raw vegetable salad as a first course to every dinner followed by variations of either roasted vegetables, vegetable soups, or vegetable & grain dishes.
- Lunch evolved naturally as leftovers from the evening meal or a continuation of breakfast fruits

What it required

- A new shopping strategy. More frequent but certainly quicker trips—mostly in and out to the produce section. We shared this task.
- Cooking/prepping ahead for 4 of the 5 weekday meals became a family event on Sundays.
- Setting up a smoothie/juicing station in our kitchen with all we needed right at hand—cutting board, knives, large bowls or platters. We began with this **Vita-mix** and have since added this **Omega Juicer**.

The benefits we experienced

- Improved our body's ability to eliminate – our output!
- Able to get in a pre-dinner swim and after dinner walk!
- Happier Lauren each evening = Happier Family
- Eliminated cravings by 95%, nothing a piece of dark chocolate or **coconut chia pudding** can't fix.
- Wake alert each morning, and clear headed. Reduced caffeine intake dramatically.
- All of us stayed flu and virus free all year.

- Our Clearer Heads = More Creative Minds
- Seriously loving what we are eating and we know we are nourishing our bodies not just filling them.

Three Challenges we faced

- Keeping enough fresh produce available without over buying and having it spoil.
- Increasing “warming” foods during winter especially this past exceptionally cold Austin winter.
- My German mother-in-law who is skeptically curious but occasionally states I am likely starving her son and grandson. ☺

Why I think this change worked


- We made a team effort. All of us got on board and stayed there.
- We believed in what we were doing. We had read enough and shared the same belief system regarding the body’s need to clean itself.
- We saw and felt the changes—immediately!
- It simplified our domestic tasks which gave us more time to play and be creative.
- There were also unexpected secondary benefits such as increased energy and motivation, a gradual opening to new perspectives on areas we had felt stuck, and the joy of being on this adventure together.

3 Tips for Keeping a Simple Kitchen



The biggest challenge I faced when we made the big shift to the Radically Simple Diet was finding the balance of the right amount of fresh food to keep on hand and not letting any spoil. Shopping once a week just wasn't enough and I found myself passing along too wilted veggies and greens to my hens. While they were happy, I knew I needed a better plan.

Here are three solutions I have found to help keep a fresh supply of fruits and veggies on hand.

1. We traded our one BIG shopping trip for two much shorter trips. With this plan I shop for 4 work day meals and then 3 weekend meals which feels quite manageable. Now that I just shop the produce and bulk isle I can keep the time down to 30-45 minutes. The German I live with can do it in 20 because he happens to drive his grocery cart like a BMW on the Autobahn. 
2. We do use Instacart to restock fruits and sometimes greens from HEB during the week. I have found this service to be a lifesaver. Yes, there is a price difference in the produce, but I have found the trade off more than worth it not to lug 3 watermelons, 4 pineapple, etc. in and out of the cart each week! The shoppers are fantastic and the app allows you to leave descriptive notes about each product you select, such as "green bananas please."
3. A CSA could likely cut down on one of your grocery trips

each week and if you have not tried one yet, this fall season is a great time to start. We have personal experience with Tecolote Farm and Johnson's Backyard Garden and can recommend both. The service and quality of produce is remarkable as well as that feel good sensation for directly supporting Austin agriculture.

Keep checking back in to find out how I plan my menus and what I do with all the produce once I get it home.