

**March is National Nutrition Month®**, and this year's theme is "Go Further with Food." The food that we eat can take us further in our health goals in multiple ways – driving us further for athletics, moving us closer to a healthy weight goal, helping us manage chronic conditions, or fueling us for our lives at home and work.

One specific way in which food can help us go further is with meal planning and preparation. While perhaps this may sound daunting, it can take as little as 10 minutes per week to get started with planning.

### **START REASONABLY**

If you're new to meal planning, don't start by setting a goal to plan all 3 meals and snacks every day for the entire week. Perhaps you plan just one dinner. Maybe it's most reasonable to plan breakfasts for a couple days. Or maybe you could start by planning your snacks for the week. Start where you are and go a little bit further.

### **SET ASIDE TIME TO PLAN**

We have to plan to plan. Set a time when you will plan out whatever meals and/or snacks you've decided to plan. This time may be on the weekend, in a free evening, over your lunch break, etc. Get out your cookbooks, laptop, Pinterest board – whatever it is you're going to use to find recipe and meal ideas. Choose what you're going to have, and write down what groceries you will need to make that happen (and take this list with you when you go grocery shopping!).

### **LOOK AT THE SCHEDULE**

While you're planning, look at your schedule for the week (or two weeks, or month – whatever time frame you're planning for). If you are going to have only 1 hour between the time you get home and the time you have to be at your son's soccer practice, don't plan a meal that requires 45 minutes baking time. Instead, look for a slow cooker recipe that can be ready when you walk in the door. If you have a large amount of time on a day off, spend it cooking a meal or two that you can put in the freezer for extra busy days.

### **CREATE AND SHOP WITH A GROCERY LIST**

Remember that grocery list we talked about? It helps ensure that you have in your pantry what you need to implement your fabulously planned meal. It also is a great way to make sure that you have your pantry staples stocked when you want them. You can keep a running list on the fridge, on your phone, in your purse – wherever works for you. Write things down when you are almost out of them, and add to that list the groceries you need to implement your plan.

Regardless of your health goals, planning will help get you further toward them. This month, begin going further with your food by planning ahead.