

Meal preparation success



A healthy meal preparation routine is like a dress-rehearsal for eating success. Sure, it takes a little effort, but the rewards for your wellbeing are worth it.

The tips below include strategies from NSW Ambulance Staff Health and the best ideas from hundreds of Paramedics who shared their meal preparation tips in the Wellbeing Workshops.

Why do meal preparation?

Meal planning and preparation reduces daily cooking time, saves money by batch-cooking, cuts food waste and helps keep your health on target.

How to do meal preparation

Good meal preparation is all about committing time to building a plan, having the right cooking equipment and using time-saving short-cuts to create a routine that automatically helps you eat well.

Follow these three basic steps (tick off what you do already and highlight what you'll start doing):

1. Menu planning

Start with what you already do well:

- Make a list of the healthy meals you make and enjoy at home. These are likely to be the ones you'll use in regular rotation.
- Then, add a few new recipes or variations. Keep it simple, with few ingredients – think a different stir-fry with veggies, meat and sauce.
- For meal ideas, search by “simple healthy...” and insert stir-fry, pasta, roast or what you like. There are so many inspirational food ideas online.
- Write up a weekly or shift-rotation menu, including dinners to cook in bulk to eat as left-overs too.
- Add in your lunches and snacks.
- Write your grocery list, ideally organised to match the supermarket aisles, starting with fresh produce.



2. Meal preparation

Now, it's time to set up your efficient meal prep system.

- Invest in practical kitchen equipment. Paramedics told us these items work – slow cooker, pie cooker, blender, food processor, air fryer, microwave egg cooker and non-stick wok.
- And quality kitchen utensils – sharp knives, easy-to-hold vegetable peeler, good grater and flexible (bendy) chopping boards.
- Make time to meal prep – decide when you'll do it and who is doing what. If it's just you, chopping veggies first is a good idea. Share tasks if you are teaming up.



DID YOU KNOW?

Every time you make time for meal preparation it saves you time back and helps to build a positive routine in your life.

RESOURCES

For more meal and snack ideas check out the Healthy Eating section at:

makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au

For simple recipes and food ideas go to:

nomoneynotime.com.au

Find more useful tips for your physical and mental wellbeing at:

www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/fonassn

ADVICE & SUPPORT



Get Healthy Information & Coaching Service

For free NSW Health telephone-based coaching on healthy eating and other lifestyle goals go to:

gethealthynsw.com.au

Speak to your **General Practitioner** to make a plan for support, including referral to an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD).



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- Set up your space – clean off benchtops, get ingredients out and have pots and pans ready.
- Double up – save time by baking in the oven at the same time as boiling on the stove top. And start with meals that take the longest to cook.

3. Food storage and transport

A few fit for purpose items really help:

- Larger glass or BPA-free plastic storage containers for family portions at home.
- Individual portion-sized containers to take your meals on the go.
- Smaller containers for snacks, sauces or salad dressings.
- A well insulated and easily accessible cool bag with generous ice bricks, and that fits your food containers.
- Some cool bags have in-built lunch boxes, some with multiple sections and some are easier to clean than others.

What to keep at work

Make the most of your work kitchen, especially if you are a paramedic or work at control:

- On the bench – start with a toaster and sandwich press. Consider a blender or a communal slow cooker.
- In the fridge – Create order in a shared fridge by storing your food inside a larger plastic storage container, labelled with your name. Items to include; cheddar cheese, yoghurt, mayonnaise, carrots. Check all is fresh once a week.
- In the freezer – bread, frozen berries, frozen leftovers and healthier frozen meals as a back-up.
- In the cupboard – breakfast cereal, canned soup, baked beans, microwave rice packs, tinned fruit (drain the juice), condiments (e.g. cinnamon, balsamic, chilli or Worstershire sauce) and spreads (e.g. Vegemite, peanut butter).

Tea fund ideas

A tea fund featuring sugary drinks and junk food is likely to sabotage your healthy eating efforts. If your tea fund needs a make-over, some ideas include:

- Fresh fruit delivery.
- Healthy snack “tuck shop” with packets of nuts, sultanas, trail mix, rice crackers, air-popped popcorn and fruit tubs.
- Smoothie bar with a blender, oats, yoghurt, frozen berries and nuts.
- Ingredients for batch cooking, taking turns with your workmates.
- BBQ and salad or roast events.
- Upgrading your tea fund nutrition is a way to help everyone eat better.

In the car

Whether in an ambulance for a long shift or on a long road trip, the key requirements for on-board food are portability and convenience:

- Start with a quality water bottle (the largest that fits).
- Add a cool-bag, with extra ice-bricks for hot days.
- Include on-the-go meals (e.g. salad wrap, zucchini slice).
- Pack snacks (e.g. fruit, nuts, muesli bars, veggie sticks and dip).
- Don't forget to take cutlery (try a camping cutlery set).

Make meal prep consistent, not perfect

Don't expect to nail your meal preparation every week. Sometimes plans get turned upside down.

Focussing on creating a regular meal prep routine will reward you for life.

