

Yogini's Favorite Five-Day Meal Planning (and time saving) Tips

Cook once, eat for five days

Shopping list:

large bin of salad greens/person
carrots and other easy veggies, like cherry tomatoes
assorted nuts/seeds
canned salad toppings like mandarin oranges, roasted red peppers, olives
1 can beans
1 brick tofu/person
1.5 c steel cut oats/person
1 c quinoa/person
½ loaf bread/person or crackers
5 bananas/person
1 lb frozen berries/person
5 apples/person
6 eggs/person
peanut butter
2 quarts of soup/person (shelf stable irradiated varieties are my choice)
2 or 3 sweet potatoes
milk of your choice

1. Start quinoa cooking on the stove. 2 parts water to 1 part quinoa.
2. Drain tofu and wrap in a towel. Place something heavy and waterproof on top.
3. Wash all produce (including fresh berries)
4. Separate salad greens into individually portioned containers (some larger for full meal salads and some smaller for side dishes)
5. Chop veggies and place them into a relish tray. Drain the mandarin oranges and include them in one section as well, and include the nuts/seeds.
6. Drain quinoa and start cooking oatmeal in the same pot (2.5c water to 1c oatmeal). Divide the quinoa among the full meal salads and save one or two servings for later in the week.
7. Drain and rinse canned beans and divide them among four ½ cup size containers.
8. Unwrap tofu and chop into bricks. Divide them among four or five ½ cup size containers. Cover with a teriyaki sauce, salad dressing, or some other flavored sauce (each can be different).
9. When oatmeal is finished, transfer it into a large resealable container or five individual serving sized microwavable containers. Stir in 1 tablespoon of peanut butter per serving and some milk. Cinnamon, molasses, and flax or hemp seed meal are also good additions.
10. Rinse the pot out and fill with water and six eggs to hard boil.
11. Prick the sweet potatoes and microwave them for 5 minutes or so.

Each morning, add frozen berries and nuts/seeds to your serving of oatmeal just before microwaving it or just before leaving the house, if you will take it with you.

To prepare a salad for the day, grab one pre-portioned salad, 2 of 3 tofu and/or beans and/or boiled egg and throw in some toppings from your relish tray. Add a piece or two of bread or crackers, a yogurt, a banana and an apple. If you want a warm lunch, bring some canned soup. You can reuse the container that held the bread/crackers each night without washing it, or you can subdivide those ahead of time as well.

Dinners can have sweet potatoes, salad, soup, etc.

Near the end of the week, perhaps Friday night, you can make a stir fry with the remaining salad toppings, quinoa, and tofu/beans/egg. You can also make a frittata with new eggs and any of the mix-ins.

Rationale and Other Tips:

Salad greens: Nutrient dense and already washed and separated. Look for the latest expiration date (at least beyond the last day of the week).

Carrots and other easy veggies, like cherry tomatoes: Cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, mushrooms, pre-cut broccoli and cauliflower are easy additions and nutrient dense. Avoid cucumbers, which can struggle in the fridge for several days and aren't terribly nutritious. Plus, they need to be chopped.

Assorted nuts/seeds: Look for different varieties each week. I like hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, shelled nuts of any kind, but particularly macadamia nuts, walnuts, almonds, and pistachios.

Canned salad toppings: Mandarin oranges, roasted red peppers, olives, and others offer more variety and are shelf stable. They hold up well in the fridge and are more nutritious than things like croutons. Frozen peas or edamame are others that can be easily thawed and mixed in.

1 can beans: Protein and fiber, and already cooked. Black beans, navy beans, garbanzos, and kidney beans all have different flavor and nutrients. They help make each week a little different.

Tofu: Tofu doesn't need to be cooked and can easily take on a flavor of a marinade. Pressing the tofu gets rid of the water that it was shipped in and makes more room for the marinade. It is easier than cooking meat. Look for varieties that also have calcium.

Steel cut oats: Any kind of oatmeal is perfectly fine, but steel cut reheats better than other varieties. Oatmeal is high in fiber and quite filling.

Quinoa: Quinoa is high in protein and works nicely in salads, because it doesn't get soggy. It also has good vitamin and mineral content.

Bread/crackers: I choose whole grain bread, or crackers that have some nutrition. Those made from nuts are more nutritious than simple rice crackers. Look for whole grain varieties of either.

Bananas: Bananas are easy! No cutting, washing or anything. Just a peel. With a handful of nuts or some peanut butter, or in a yogurt they become a great snack.

Frozen berries: Berries are superfoods, and frozen berries are already washed, frozen right after they are picked, and won't get fuzzy in the fridge. Throw some in yogurt as well, but not more than 12 hours before you plan to eat it, otherwise the berries will take on an unsavory texture.

Apples: Easy to eat and unlikely to spoil apples also travel well.

Eggs: Eggs are very high in protein with some good fats.

Peanut butter: Higher in protein than other nut butters and peanut butter is shelf stable. I prefer the kind you grind yourself at the grocery store because it doesn't have fillers or sugar. If it is easier to have a shelf-stable version at home, I like Earth Balance.

Soup: The irradiated soups are nutritious and much lower in salt than the canned varieties. Look for

those that compliment salads, or those that can add variety and nutrition.

Sweet potatoes: More nutritious than white potatoes and very easy to cook. You can eat the peel, just be careful to wash.

Milk of your choice: I like soymilk because it has more protein than other milks, but anything will do.