



HOW TO START MEAL PREPPING

JESSICA MYERS | nutrition × USC

Meal prep has been all of the hype for sometime now, but let's dive a little deeper into what it is and if it really lives up to its name...

Just to clarify, meal prepping and meal planning are often used interchangeably but they are actually different from one another. Meal planning is figuring out what you are going to make and when you are going to eat it throughout the week. Meal preparation on the other hand involves cooking multiple days worth of food into portioned out, single serving containers which is to be eaten throughout the week. This typically occurs on Sundays, before the work week, and takes a few hours of your day to prep all the food. Although meal planning has its own benefits, meal preparation takes it one step further.

Now that you know have a clear definition of WHAT meal prepping is, let's talk about WHY we should be doing it.

Meal preparation has many benefits and little to no disadvantages, which is why I love it. In terms of health benefits, meal prepping allows for you to eat your favorite meals without overindulging, as you are portioning out your food prior to meal time. This helps to make sure you stay on track with your goals without having to calorie count!

In addition to health benefits, meal prepping allows you to go to the store and only buy what you need and the exact amount of it, resulting in you saving money and reducing food waste! My favorite part of meal prep has to be feeling less stressed during meal time, knowing I have a well balanced meal prepared for me in the fridge. Do you really need any more reasons to meal prep?! I've been missing out all of my life, seriously.

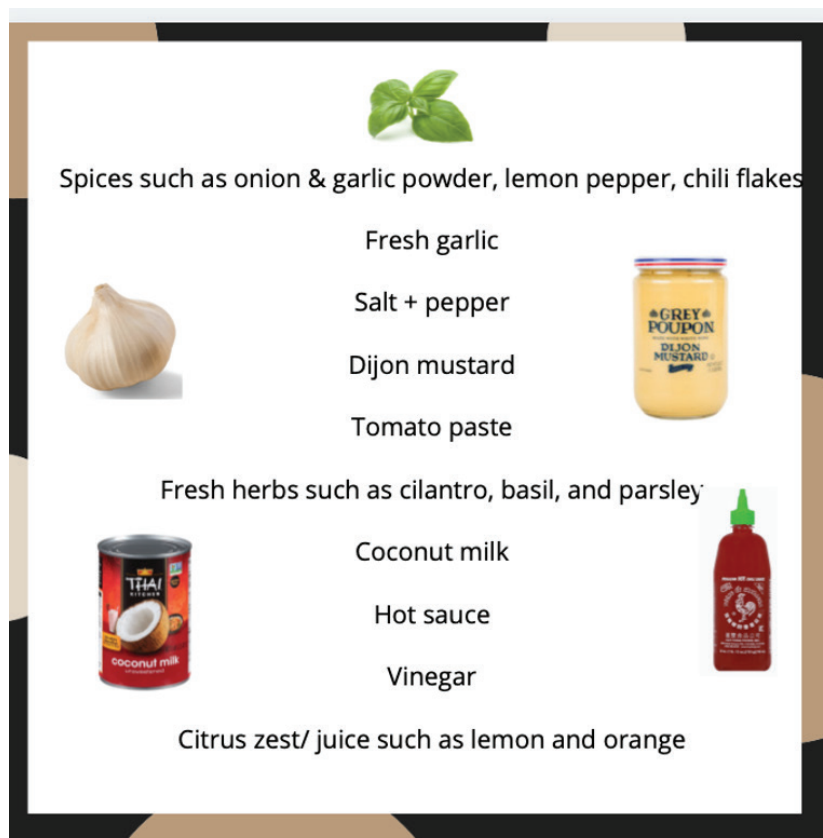
In order to be successful at meal preparation, the first thing is to, well, prepare! Think of a budget, what foods you enjoy eating and making, and think of your own goals that you are trying to achieve. Once you have those down, all you have to do is create a grocery list and start cooking!

For those who are confused about where to begin, try starting with this meal prep formula, which is based on the MyPlate concept and describes the proportions in how divide up your healthy plate:

$\frac{1}{4}$ Protein + $\frac{1}{4}$ Grains/Starch + $\frac{1}{2}$ Vegetables

This formula should help you prepare your recipes for the week by ensuring that you get in a wide variety of nutrients through different kinds of proteins, grains, and vegetables. Some good protein choices are eggs, chicken breast, and legumes such as lentils and garbanzo beans. Examples of some easy grains to cook are brown rice, quinoa, and bulgar. And last but not least we have veggies! You can choose any of your favorites. I really like prepping with bell peppers, broccoli, asparagus, and sweet potatoes. Also, be sure to change your recipes and alternate your protein, grains, and veggies each week so you can avoid getting bored of the meals you eat.

My last tip to you all is to be sure to flavor and season your food! This is KEY whether you are meal prepping or not. Nobody wants to eat boring, bland food. If it tastes bad, you're most likely not going to eat it, so here is a list of various spices, herbs, and condiments that I like to use when cooking.



The beauty of meal prepping lies in the ability to customize your meals to reflect your dietary needs and foods that you enjoy. If you have been thinking about meal prepping, here is your sign to do it! You have nothing to lose and only so much to gain. Once you try it, I know you'll be hooked, just like I am!