



Meal planning for healthy smiles

Meal planning is a great way to eat healthier all year long. Here's how planning ahead can help you eat a well-balanced diet and improve your health — including your oral health.

IT'S EASY TO START A MEAL-PLANNING ROUTINE

- **Create a master list of your favorite meals.** Let your family help. You can look up recipes, sample menus and use meal-planning tools online for inspiration. As a general guide, fiber-rich fruits and vegetables should cover half your plate, while lean protein and whole grains should each take up a quarter of the plate.
- **Pick a specific day to plan your weekly menus and shop for groceries.** Remember to plan for healthy snacks you can eat on the go. Apples, pears, celery, carrots, Greek yogurt, cheese, turkey, nuts and seeds all make great choices for your oral, and overall health.
- **Stick to your grocery list and avoid impulse shopping while hungry.** Shopping online can help you resist temptation. Also, make sure to choose lower calorie and lower sodium versions of ingredients, when possible.
- **Prepare food for the week.** If you want to plan ahead even further, try preparing freezer-friendly meals.¹

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**AFTER A SNACK,
DRINK WATER TO HELP
RINSE YOUR TEETH.**



**BACTERIA FEED
ON SUGAR,
FORMING DENTAL
PLAQUE.**



**BEWARE OF
FOODS HIGH
IN SUGAR.**

Meal planning for healthy smiles (continued)



With the right meal plan and prepping ahead of time, you can:

EAT HEALTHIER

Home meal planning has been linked to a healthier diet and less obesity. You gain control over ingredients and portion sizes compared to eating out. That makes it easier to cut down on cavity-causing sugars and starches.¹

As much as you might like sugar, bacteria in your mouth like it even more. Bacteria form a stick film, or plaque, that feed on sugar and then release acids, which if not removed by brushing, can cause cavities. That plaque may also lead to gum disease and bad breath.

Many tempting foods are full of sugar, including cookies, pies, cakes, candy, ice cream, frosting and non-diet soda. Sticky sweets that linger on your teeth — like caramels and dried fruit — may be especially damaging. Foods that are high in carbs, such as chips, pretzels and crackers, may also damage teeth. That's because these foods can stick in your teeth and break down into cavity-causing sugar.

However, you may be shocked to find many other items — including some considered to be healthy and others that don't even taste sweet — contain large amounts of added sugar, including:

- Flavored yogurt
- Baked beans
- Barbecue sauce
- Fruit juice
- Ketchup
- Salad dressing
- Spaghetti sauce
- Sports and energy drinks²
- Canned soup

Children who regularly snack on starchy potato chips and sugary cookies are four times more likely to get cavities than kids who don't.²

When possible, avoid foods and drinks that are high in sugar. If you do indulge, do so in moderation. When you eat or drink something sugary, it's better to do so with a meal rather than as a snack. Your mouth produces more saliva during mealtime, which can help wash away sugar. After consuming something sugary, drink water to help remove some of the sugar from your teeth.²

STRESS LESS

When you plan ahead, you help eliminate the daily stress of planning and preparing meals. People who report less stress enjoy better oral health than those with greater stress.¹

ENJOY A GREATER VARIETY OF FOODS

Meal planning has been linked to eating a wider variety of food. Eating a well-balanced diet that's rich in fruits and vegetables, lean protein, low-fat dairy products and whole grains — while cutting back on sugars and starches — may help reduce your risk for oral diseases.¹

For recipes, activities, information about good oral health habits and more, visit our website at [DeltaDentalVA.com/members/tooth-fairy-hideout](https://www.DeltaDentalVA.com/members/tooth-fairy-hideout).

¹"Plan for healthier meals and healthier smiles," www.deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/nutrition/meal-planning-for-healthy-smile.html. Accessed August 2024. ²"There's no sugarcoating it — sugar damages teeth," www.deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/nutrition/theres-no-sugarcoating-it-sugar-damages-teeth.html. Accessed August 2024.