

When it comes to advice relating to healthy eating and lifestyles, it is undeniable that a wealth of information is available to us. It's easy for advice to remain as just that – advice with no action. Even if you have the best intentions of making some changes to your diet, it can often come second due to the pressures of work and family life.

When it comes to making sustainable changes to your diet and lifestyle, there are 3 essential steps that can help. These are:

1. **Prioritise** – take responsibility for your health.
2. **Plan** – plan meals, make shopping lists and avoid impulse buying.
3. **Prepare** – have nutritious choices available so that convenience foods aren't your only option.

Prioritise

Becoming proactive about your nutrition and lifestyle habits is the best way to make sustainable changes for a longer and healthier life. Prioritise your health now rather than waiting until a health crisis emerges and it becomes necessary to re-evaluate your lifestyle.

Start by reviewing your life goals. Ask yourself how important is being healthy in reaching those goals? What would you do without your health? From here, set yourself realistic goals – it may be aiming to go for a long walk 3 times a week or committing to bringing a healthy lunch from home to work on most days.

To kick start this positive health mind shift, try seeing healthy eating and moving your body as non-negotiable daily habits – things you want to do; not just things you should do.



Include health in your time management plan. It's amazing how we manage to fit in cleaning the car or trips to the hairdressers, yet time for physical activity or meal preparation gets pushed further down the list of things to do.

Allocating time in your diary for physical activity and meal preparation can help you meet your health goals. Also, it's important to allocate ME time in your busy schedule. It could be as simple as having a bath, reading a book or going for an early morning walk. Something that is not work or socially related but downtime – just for you.

Plan

Do you often wander the aisles of the supermarket looking for inspiration only to get home with a bag full of ingredients that don't make a full meal? After a busy day at work, or looking after the kids, it's not the most enjoyable way to spend your time. Making time each week to plan your meals can help ensure you are eating healthily whilst saving time and money.

Tips for planning your meals

- Consider your schedule – which nights you will be home at a reasonable time to cook, what nights will you be late at the office and may need to take dinner with you?
- Develop a meal plan that fits with your schedule and create a shopping list for this. Having a plan and a shopping list means you are less likely to buy items on impulse which can save you money. It also gives you a chance to consider what's on special at the supermarket and weave these items into your menu.
- Consider when you may have time to cook a double quantity of a certain recipe to freeze for a later meal or workday lunches.
- Ensure your meal plan is nutritionally adequate by making sure you include a good variety of foods to help you reach the dietary guidelines. See www.healthyfoodhealthyplanet.org for a menu planner tool complete with recipes.

Prepare

Never underestimate the power of preparation when it comes to eating well! It can be tempting to opt for takeaway if your fridge and pantry are bare. Keeping a constant supply of ingredients with a long shelf life in the pantry, fridge and freezer can help you create some quick last minute meals.

The table provides a list of some pantry, fridge and freezer staples to ensure you have access to nutritious choices.

Pantry Basics	Fridge & Freezer Basics
<i>Dry Goods</i> Dried pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, flour, oats	<i>Vegetables</i> Onions, potatoes, carrots, garlic, frozen mixed vegetables
<i>Canned Goods</i> Tomatoes, legumes, tuna, salmon, soup, vegetables, fruit	<i>Fruit</i> Frozen berries, frozen bananas
<i>Flavours</i> Soy sauce, stocks, dried herbs, spices, curry powder	<i>Meat and Dairy</i> Frozen mince/lean meat and chicken, frozen grated cheese
<i>Other Basics</i> Olive oil, vinegar, long life milk	<i>Other Basics</i> Frozen bread and wraps

Quick meal ideas using your pantry fridge and freezer staples.

- Minestrone soup using tinned tomatoes, stock, canned beans, pasta, onion and carrots.
- Tuna pasta bake using frozen grated cheese, long life milk, onions and dried herbs.
- Chickpea curry with rice using tinned chick peas, frozen vegetables, curry powder, tinned tomatoes and dried herbs & spices.

More tips to help you stay prepared:

- When cooking a meal, make extra portions for lunch the next day or freeze for a future meal. A roast chicken can be used as dinner one night and reinvented for a chicken and vegetable pizza the next day.
- Use a spare hour over the weekend to chop vegetables like carrot, celery, onions and beans and store them in an air tight container. These can be used as the base for many mid-week meals and save you preparation time later in the week.
- Many hands make light work! Make it a social occasion and team up with friends and family when cooking in bulk for freezer meals. You can save costs by purchasing groceries in bulk and preparing a range of dishes in a much shorter time.