

Home Living



Start Meal Prepping

While the hustle and bustle of life has temporarily slowed down, there will come a day when the daily demands of life come roaring back full force. Be prepared with a strategy to answer the question: “What’s for dinner?”

Have you had trouble finding the time to get healthy meals on the table? Do you want to eat healthier and avoid resorting to fast food when you’re in a time crunch? Meal prepping might be the solution for you. It’s the practice of preparing a week’s worth of meals ahead of time, economizing the use of ingredients, and portioning meals out for use in the coming week.

BudgetBytes.com warns that meal prepping is not for everyone. You will need to eat a lot of leftovers and there can be a lack of variety. “If having control over what you eat, or maximizing your time or budget is more valuable to you than eating something different every single day, meal prepping is your ticket,” according to the website.

You can go big or small with meal prepping. Aim to prep only dinner, or breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Here are some tips to get you started.



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Plan. Like many endeavors, good meal prepping starts with good planning. Make a list of foods you’d like to prep for the week. Check which ingredients you have on hand, and economize your ingredients to save time, even if it means modifying a recipe. (There’s no need to cook two different kinds of pasta when one would suffice.)

It’s all about the containers. Check through your inventory

of plastic or glass storage containers. Purchase more, if needed. You’ll need a lot of containers to keep everything organized in the refrigerator.

Be careful which foods you choose. Not all foods are good for meal prepping. While meat, grains, beans, hearty vegetables, whole fruits, nuts, seeds, cheeses and sauces such as salad dressing are all good options, other foods like lettuce, berries and crunchy

options such as chips or crackers are not. To really make the most of your time on cooking day, opt for pre-prepared ingredients, such as cubed butternut squash, diced onions

Use spices for variation. If you’re eating healthy, chicken breast can be a good option for three or four days of the week. Mix things up by using different seasonings for each day.

Cook smart. Your slow cook-

er or pressure cooker is your friend. If the goal is to save time, you can even shorten the amount of time you spend in the kitchen prepping with these time-saving gadgets. Also aim to use your oven space wisely, fitting in as many dishes as you can at once. If you’re making a meal that can easily be doubled, such as soup or chili, make a double batch and freeze the rest for future use.

Trace your Ancestry

Tracing your ancestry is a worthwhile project that will help you come to better understand yourself and your family, and allow you to pass that knowledge on to your children or grandchildren.

Tracing one's roots used to be a much more laborious process, with the need to locate paper records and source documents that were often tricky to find. Modern technology has made it much easier, with the ability to search online databases for records, and even to have a DNA test performed to get insights into one's ancestry going back as much as a thousand of years and be connected with living relatives.

Before you get started, make contact with any family members you're aware of who have researched your family history. There likely exists a cache of your family's documents or even memoirs or existing family trees. If there's any existing information, whoever collected it is likely more than happy to discuss with you the work they've done and how you can get started.

USE AN ONLINE SERVICE

Online services such as 23andMe.com and Ancestry.com use DNA tests to get your



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ancestry search started. You can choose to make the results of your test available to others so you can make connections with relatives and learn from their ancestry research, which will help you build your family tree. These paid services provide access to billions of historical records, such as birth, death and Census records, property records, news articles, photos and more.

DO IT YOURSELF

If you're looking for more of a hands-on approach to tracing your ancestry, AncestralFindings.com offers a list of ways to take matters into your own hands. They include visiting relatives and interviewing them, taking a vacation to a place significant to your family's history, organizing family photos, organizing a family reunion, locating a family cemetery and planning a visit, or

making genealogy gifts for family members. Read the list at bit.ly/2VIGFqa.

LEARN THE ROPES

You will need a bit of an education about how to trace your ancestry before you get started. Searching online documents is an art, as even small changes to the phrases you use to search can yield huge differences in results. Learn the basics of Boolean searching. You'll also

need some basic technological savvy, as online genealogy programs use a common file called a GEDCOM file that can be exchanged between programs. Each online platform has its own user interface, so use the site's how-to videos to get started. If you're stuck on a part of your family tree for which you just can't find the data you need, you can even hire an expert to tackle those parts of the project for you.

Take Up a New Hobby

Finding a new hobby as an adult can be challenging, since many of us are faced with multiple demands on our time. Carving out some time for yourself, however, is great for stress relief and relaxation.

If you're finding yourself with more time on your hands during social distancing, use it to finally learn to knit or take up model airplane building. You can teach an old dog new tricks.

Bustle.com recommends trying on a few hobbies for size. You don't have to stick with the first thing you try. Think about what you enjoyed doing as a child and see if you can spark that creativity again.

GET CREATIVE

Some creative hobbies, such as reading, writing and drawing require very few materials and are easy to start. Check out some websites for topics that interest you. See if there are any local online groups of people with a shared hobby. You might find out about the best biking trails or make connections with a local quilting guild and even make new friends.

Journaling during social distancing is a great way to process your feelings about



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the situation. Many people are facing disappointment, loneliness and frustration. Writing can help you express these feelings in a healthy way.

Find ways to share your creations. At doodleaddicts.com, you can share your drawings and see the work of other artists, and even meet local artists. At commaful.com, you can share your writing and get feedback.

LEARN A SKILL

If you'd like to acquire a new skill, such as dancing, cooking, knitting or woodworking, hit YouTube for video tutorials. You can teach yourself almost anything via YouTube. If you'd like to get hands-on experience, check your local community college to see if they offer courses you can sign up for once social distancing restrictions are eased.

GET FIT

If you've always wanted to learn yoga, now is a great time to start. All you need is a YouTube video, a mat or rug and you've got your own "yoga studio." Meditation apps for your phone can teach you to meditate. Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that's beneficial for the mind and body. Join an online group offering Zoom-based sessions.

LEARN TO DIY

DIY home projects require more materials than most hobbies but, if you do quality work, you can increase the value of your home with your DIY skills.

Some easy beginner projects are installing laminate flooring, interior painting, putting up wallpaper, installing new light fixtures or ceiling fans, and building a stone fire pit.

Take a Hike

With social distancing measures in place, it's important to still find time for exercise. One safe way to do that is by taking a hike.

Hiking is great exercise. A person weighing about 175 pounds can burn roughly 450 calories per hour hiking on flat terrain. You can tailor your hike to your family's fitness and abilities, all while staying in compliance with recommendations for staying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXPLORE LOCAL TRAILS

Check with your local forest preserves, parks department or state and national parks about which trails are open. Avoid trails that might get busy. Check trail maps for ratings of trail difficulty and be sure to choose trails that are within your ability. (This is no time to get in over your head and get lost or injured, requiring valuable emergency services to come to your rescue.)

A hike doesn't have to mean a day-long jaunt up a steep mountain trail. You can benefit from hitting the paved trails in your neighborhood or small local parks. Find a new favorite place to burn off a few calories after dinner and establish a new, healthy family habit.

TAKE THE RIGHT GEAR

If you plan to make a day of your hiking trip, you'll need



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backpacks, water, mosquito repellent, sunscreen, hats, proper shoes for everyone, and you'll want to pack a lunch and snacks. Be sure to take along a charged cellphone (a power bank is a good idea), as well as downloading online maps for the areas you'll be visiting, in

case you lose cellular signal and are unable to access that info from the trail.

Don't forget a first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic cream, bug bite cream, ibuprofen, antihistamine pills and any other supplies you think you might need.

MAKE IT A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Make up a list of items you are likely to see on your hike, and have children go on a scavenger hunt to find plants, animals and other objects while you hike. You also could make up a list of flora and

fauna in the area, with short descriptions of each, for your kids to read about before you hike.

Use websites, books or YouTube videos to do research together with your children. Take a camera along to document what you find.

Start an Exercise Plan

If you're working from home during the pandemic, there's never been a better time to start an exercise plan.

You have more control over your schedule and you can start good habits now that will hopefully become routine by the time you're back to working outside the home.

Don't just jump in without a plan, however. Here are some tips to help those who are establishing a new exercise regimen find success. As always, discuss your plans with your doctor first.

Assess your fitness level. Both the Mayo Clinic and WebMD recommend conducting a basic assessment of your fitness level before getting started. The Mayo Clinic suggests taking your pulse before and after walking a mile, timing a one-mile walk or 1.5-mile run, noting how many pushups you can do at one time and how far you can reach forward while sitting on the floor with your legs in front of you, as well as measuring your waist and calculating your body mass index.

Set a goal for your exercise plan. What would you like to accomplish? Reduce your BMI? Run a 5K? The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week, or 75 min-



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utes of vigorous physical activity per week. Set a realistic goal based on your current level of fitness and your commitment to exercising. Set small, measurable benchmarks for yourself, even if it's just walking for 30 minutes three times a week. Setting unachievable goals or impossible milestones can set you up

for defeat quickly. You should start slow and gradually increase the weights you use and the time you spend exercising, but increase by no more than 10% each week.

Choose your exercises. HHS recommends doing strength training exercises for all major muscle groups at least two times a week. You can accom-

plish this with a single set of each exercise, using weights or resistance bands. Choose your weight or resistance band level by determining which one tires your muscles after about 12 to 15 repetitions. Include a variety of activities in your workout so you don't get bored. For example, you can get your cardio one day by

running, and another by biking. Look for fun, creative ways to exercise, such as an online dance fitness class.

In the end, what's important is making a plan you can stick with. You will likely have setbacks on your fitness journey. Be prepared to keep yourself motivated and keep working toward your goal.

Start a Long-Term Project

Which long-term projects have been on your to-do list? Redesigning rooms in your home? Painting your home's interior? Starting a garden? Designing your landscaping?

There's no time like the present to tackle these jobs and make the most of your time at home.

The first step is planning your project. Turn to Pinterest or other websites for inspiration to get you motivated. Then use these tips for a successful project.

GET A PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL

A basic spreadsheet will do to get you organized and plan out your work. If you're more visual, however, an online project management platform such as Basecamp or Asana can help you manage your project in a more visual way. Set tasks and milestones for yourself, or assign them to others who will be helping with your project, and check in often to see how you've progressed.

If your task is more creative in nature, put all your visual ideas together using an Evernote notebook or a Pinterest board. If you're redesigning a room in your home, make a photo collage of all



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the different products you find to see the whole picture.

GATHER YOUR MATERIALS

Which materials do you have? Can you borrow equipment from friends or neighbors? Can you rent large pieces

of equipment instead of buying? Take stock of what you can borrow or rent before making a shopping list.

Online shopping is a great option right now, but be sure to contact local businesses first to see how you can shop local. (Local businesses need

your support now more than ever.) Although some local retailers' stores are closed, many are providing curbside pickup of merchandise to minimize exposure.

MAKE TIME

We all have daily responsi-

bilities to meet. Plan out small chunks of time each day to chip away at your project tasks. Don't pressure yourself to get a project done quickly, and be realistic with your schedule. If you have children, help teach them practical skills by giving them tasks to do.

Learn Something New

Time at home need not be time wasted.

With the use of technology, it's never been easier to learn a new skill.

Whether it's a personal endeavor or a professional skill that can give your career a boost, any time spent learning is a great investment.

During the pandemic, educational institutions have increased their online offerings, and many are offering discounted or free programs. Take advantage of these opportunities to enrich yourself.

The Literacy Information and Communication System website (lincs.ed.gov/) offers free resources for learning about a range of topics, including reading, math, science, English, basic job skills, citizenship, personal finance and health and fitness.

You can read e-books about aeronautics and space history, learn about marine life and conservation from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, listen to a personal finance podcast, or improve your job skills with short online courses in topics such as email, cloud storage and video conferencing.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Check with community colleges and your local job ser-



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vices organization to see which continuing education courses are available online. Local libraries often subscribe to online training services such as Lynda.com, where you can learn to use new software, learn tips to be a better manager or learn photography. Universal Class (universalclass.com) offers continuing education credit courses on everything from accounting and law to par-

enting and special education.

HEALTH AND FITNESS

Many local gyms are offering their exercise classes online, so you can continue learning about yoga or even take up a new skill, like kickboxing. Check with your gym or recreation center about course offerings.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

Check your local library's

website for links to online learning resources for both children and adults. You'll likely find homework help, links to online storytimes, websites where you can see musical performances and cultural activities, virtual tours of museums and zoos, and more.

GO IVY LEAGUE

Adding top-notch university courses to your resume

can't hurt a thing. Class Central aggregates offerings from universities such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Wharton School of Business, Cornell and more at bit.ly/2XDLhQR. Topics include business, humanities, computer science, engineering, programming, personal development, the social sciences and more. Most courses include a professional development certificate.