Planning meals; secrets to success

By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

With all the uncertainty going on in the world right now, it’s a good time to consider prepping meals for the upcoming week or stocking the freezer for easy-to-reach-for meal options. This type of pre-planning can help limit your exposure to high-traveled areas, like the grocery store, while also saving you time and money.

When it comes to meal planning, there is no “correct” method. Your approach may differ based on your cooking ability, personal goals, food preferences and schedules. If you eat fast food or takeout several nights of the week, you might have a goal to limit the times you eat out. If you already make a weekly shopping trip, your goal might be to choose one day when you do most of the cooking rather than firing up the stove or oven every night. If you are someone who regularly cooks at home, you might decide to spend a few extra minutes on Sunday creating a weekly meal schedule so you are not deciding last minute what to make and can be sure to have needed ingredients on hand.

The best way to start the meal planning process is to pick a day of the week to plan your menu -- be it a menu for a week or a menu for the month. Then, make your grocery list. Be sure to take inventory of what you already have in the pantry, fridge and freezer. Some people prefer to designate a particular day of the week to a specific type of recipe and plan accordingly, such as Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday, Crock-Pot Wednesday, Stir-Fry Friday, and Soup and Sandwich Saturday.

If you need some inspiration for your menu, here are a few of my prep-ahead favorites:

**Breakfast:** Egg cups, sweet potato hash, yogurt and fruit bistro box, overnight oats, breakfast taco scramble or breakfast burrito, chia seed pudding, smoked salmon breakfast bowl and boiled eggs.

**Lunch:** Mason jar salads (put the dressing at the bottom or add at time of eating), sandwich wrap, chicken or tuna salad on greens or toast, burrito bowl, roasted vegetables or zucchini noodles with pesto.

**Dinner:** Chili, stews, soups, salmon and asparagus, chicken parmesan, quinoa salad with a southwest twist that can be eaten hot or cold, stuffed bell peppers, spaghetti and meatballs, chicken and broccoli, one pan stir-frys and dinner casseroles.

The secret to efficient meal prep is multi-tasking. While foods are baking or simmering, chop fresh fruit and vegetables for grab-and-go snacks, or wash and dry salad greens for later. If you prefer not to pre-cook proteins, consider pre-chopping and marinating fish, poultry, tofu or meat so you can quickly pop them into the oven or a stir-fry later in the week. Consider making a double batch of a particular recipe or extra portions for another day or two of meals. Extra portions can also be frozen for later use. Get a head start on lunches by dividing prepared food into individual containers on prep day. You’ll earn yourself an extra 10 minutes of sleep knowing your lunch is ready for you to grab on your way out the door!

Meal planning is a great tool that can not only help us in times like these, when we need to limit our exposure to large groups, but also can save us time and money in the long run. Taking the time to develop this healthy habit now can help decrease stress and ensure we stay on a healthy eating track, even in the most uncertain of times.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*