

MEAL PLANS SUCK

WHY THEY USUALLY
DON'T WORK



THE MARBLE METHOD

Lots of people looking to improve their eating think meal plans are the answer.

The only problem? Meal plans usually suck... and they rarely last. So, instead of prescribing yet another doomed eating regimen, check out these 6 ways to transform any diet in a sustainable way.

“Do I get a meal plan?”

This is the most common question we get from folks who are considering, or just started out in, our nutrition coaching programs.

The answer: No, we don't do meal plans.

But we can't blame people for asking.

Sure, meal plans have long been a staple of the fitness and nutrition industry. Coaches are taught to create them. Clients are taught to expect them.

Unfortunately...

Most of the time, meal plans don't work.

You see, traditional meal plans are explicit prescriptions.

Eat this exact thing, in this exact amount, at this exact time.

For example, you'll often see:

Breakfast – 7:30am

3 eggs, scrambled 1 cup vegetables 1 piece whole grain toast 1 cup coffee 1 glass water

Morning snack – 10:00am

1 protein bar 1 handful mixed nuts

Lunch – 12:30pm

4 oz chicken 2 cups salad 1 handful seeds 1 glass water

After exercise – 4:30pm

1 scoop whey protein 1/2 cup frozen fruit 1 tsp omega 3 oil 12 oz water

Dinner – 7:00pm

4 oz steak 1 cup cooked veggies 1 baked potato 1 glass water Y

You might be thinking, "Good! I want a plan. I'm sick of trying to figure all this stuff out! Just tell me what to eat!"

Unfortunately, when we try to follow rigid prescriptions like this, lots can (and often does) go wrong.

Welcome to the meal transformation game.

When you play with the idea of a food spectrum or food continuum, you get to experiment with variables like:

**what you eat, and
how you eat it.**

Think of this as a game.

How can you play “make this meal just a little bit better” in every situation?

In which situations is that easier or harder?

When your choices are limited (for instance, when you're traveling, or eating at a workplace cafeteria), how can you shoot for “a little bit better” while still being realistic, and without trying to be “perfect”?

Let's transform breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Here's how that "food spectrum" might look in daily life,
with a sample day of eating.

Transforming Breakfast

Stage 1

Let's say that your go-to breakfast is a whipped-cream
coffee drink and a chocolate croissant.

You pick it up in the drive-thru, and wolf it down on your
way to work.

This is your starting point. It's not "bad". It's just no longer
working for you.

You're getting indigestion from rushing, the croissant
doesn't hold you at all, and you've just spilled the coffee
on your crotch while changing lanes.

**Now your game is to improve your breakfast just a
little bit, starting with what you already have or
do.**



Transforming Breakfast

Stage 2

Your opening moves in the meal transformation game:

- You might replace the croissant with a whole grain muffin.
- Instead of a “dessert in a cup”, you get a regular coffee with a single cream and sugar.
- You grab a yogurt cup on your way out of the house for a bit of protein.

Naturally, you're still rushed and busy... so you eat your breakfast with some distractions, while scrolling through emails at work.

But this is a solid start. Well done.



Transforming Breakfast

Stage 3

Next level of game play:

- You switch the muffin to granola with cottage cheese or Greek yogurt.
- You switch the cream in your coffee for 2% milk. (Or even go right to black coffee, you meal player you!)
- You add some colorful fruit. You're now eating out of dishes on a table, instead of out of takeout packages off the dashboard of your car.

Of course, you're still checking out the news headlines while you eat...

No problem. We're keeping it real.



Transforming Breakfast

Stage 4

Now you are seriously playing like a pro.

- You've changed "rushing and panicked" to "set aside a little extra time to enjoy a leisurely breakfast".
- You cleverly prepped an egg frittata with veggies in advance on your food prep day.
- The coffee's become green tea, since you noticed that too much coffee was tweaking you out.
- The protein plus colorful fruit and veg have become the stars of the meal.
- You've discovered you really like lemon water. (WHAT? You don't even know you anymore!)
- You eat mindfully, feeling relaxed, while watching the sun rise.

Ahhh.



Transforming Lunch

Stage 1

At this point, starting out, the idea of a sit-down lunch feels flat out ridiculous.

“Eat slowly? Who has time for that during a busy workday?”

Grab a burger and go!"

Another “car dashboard” meal. Another stomach ache and regret.

You decide you might want to play with this meal too.



Transforming Lunch

Stage 2

To improve this meal a little bit:

- You go to a higher-end burger place where you're pretty sure they use real meat.
- You get a side salad with that burger, and maybe just a few potato chips.
- You choose a diet soda instead of regular.
- You don't eat in your car, but you do eat by your computer.

That's OK. You're progressing.



Transforming Lunch

Stage 3

At this stage, you're doing a little prep work:

- You whipped up some burgers in advance so they are handy and ready to take to work.
- You also grabbed some nice cheese and whole grain buns from the local market on shopping day

.For lunch, all you have to do is take your homemade burger and its fixins to work.

You still grab a diet cola from the vending machine to wash it down.

You move from your desk to the lunchroom, where you socialize with co-workers. This slows you down a bit and helps you digest and relax.



Transforming Lunch

Stage 4

You're having the burger without the bun, alongside a nice pre-prepped salad

.Instead of staying at your desk or in the office, you take a break

.You sit outside and get some fresh air while you enjoy your meal.

For a drink, water's all you need.



Transforming Dinner

Stage 1

It's 8pm. You've just gotten home after an insane day at work.

All you want to do is put food into your face and zone out in front of the TV.

You can't even imagine making anything more complicated than boxed macaroni 'n' cheese right now.

Ketchup and hot dogs are as fancy as it gets.



Transforming Dinner

Stage 2

Same concept, but:

- You're adding some extra protein with the help of a rotisserie chicken leg that you grabbed at the grocery store on the way home.
- You've added a side salad, just grabbing a few handfuls of pre-washed greens out of a bag.
- You've whipped up your own pasta.

Work is still on your mind, and a couple drinks will take the edge off.



Transforming Dinner

Stage 3

Things are getting fancy

- .You're upping the protein with a little more chicken.
- You're having a little less pasta.
- You've also added a nice big salad to the mix.
- You've cut the booze to 1 drink.

Plus, you're sitting at the dinner table, instead of flopping down on your couch or standing over the sink.



Transforming Dinner

Stage 4

Again, we're playing at pro level here.

With your meal planning and prep strategies, even a weeknight dinner looks good.

- You can whip up a delicious salad in 3 minutes flat and you have some pre-cooked quinoa on hand.
- That rotisserie chicken is still a fast, convenient option, but now it's got some healthy buddies.
- You're indulging in a single glass of good wine these days, and you take time to savor it.



Meal transformation is not about reaching perfection.

If you're at stage 1, all you have to do is shoot for stage 2.
Or stage 1.5.

If you're in stage 2, play with getting to stage 3.

And if you're stage 3, heck, you can stay where you are.

You might never get to stage 4. Or it might only happen at times when you're relaxed and have a little extra time.

Stage 4 might only happen on Sunday night, whereas the rest of your week is a mix of stages 1, 2, and — if you're super lucky — 3.

And that's OK.

How far you progress along the continuum all depends on what YOU want, what YOU need, and what YOU can reasonably do, right now.

Over time, things can change.

Play YOUR game.

Success secret: Have a food prep ritual.

You might look at these photos and think, “How can people possibly do all that?”

One success secret: Having a food prep ritual.

The idea is simple:

Practice planning and preparing healthy food in advance.

This makes healthy eating convenient and easy.

It also makes decisions easier: You don't have to make a choice when you're rushed and hungry.



Your food prep ritual can include:

- shopping (or arranging to have food delivered)
- menu and meal planning
- washing and chopping vegetables
- cooking/preparing protein (e.g. cooking up some chicken breasts)
- cooking meals in bulk (e.g. casseroles, soups, stews, chili)
- preparing the dry ingredients for things like Super Shakes or healthy muffin mix
- soaking grains/beans beforehand so that they'll be ready to cook later
- sorting foods into smaller containers or baggies
- freezing and refrigerating food for later
- planning healthy meals that someone else cooks (e.g. using a meal delivery service, deciding in advance what to order at a restaurant, etc.)
- looking ahead to ensure healthy eating strategies during the next few days, especially during difficult times (e.g. a busy week, traveling, dealing with a family crisis, etc.)

Mix and match any of these to find what works for you. Experiment with systems, skills and strategies that work for YOU and YOUR life.