

Back to School Time!!!! Well, sort of....

By Chef Jen

Well, here we are! Another school year is underway.... For most people, this looks a whole lot different than usual. Many parents are working from home and also dealing with their kids going to school virtually. I am dealing with this as well. It's not like summer, where they didn't need a structured day, or to wake up and go to bed at the same time. Let's face it, I started quarantine with all the good intentions of a structured day at home:

9 am- wake up and breakfast

10 am- reading time

10:30- play outside with the dog

11:00- free time

12: lunch

Etc....etc...etc....

Can I ask you all this question: How many people did this actually work for????? NOT in my house!

Basically, the kid did whatever she wanted, as long as I was able to get my work done. So now, for my fellow moms who also had the best of intentions, and for the procrastinators, it's time to get back into the swing of things. We are all hoping that it all works out better than it did in March when we had to adjust to the "at home work and school life" so unexpectedly! Many moms and dads have to alternate entertaining or caring for little ones and work/meeting/calls. Some moms or some dads just had to carry it all, if the other was an essential worker. It's so stressful, it's so tiring and it's so mentally draining!

Don't expect this blog to be able to solve all of that for you! I'm NOT the one for that sort of advice, since I can't even follow the structured schedule I set myself! BUT, I do have ideas to help the day go smoother by helping you with your meal ideas. Also, I can tell you that lavender has been [scientifically proven](#) to help aid in anxiety and relaxation.... So, if you aren't allergic and like (or can deal with) the smell of lavender and do some meal prepping, then this blog is for YOU! 😊 FYI- lemon and peppermint essential oils *might help* with focus and alertness.¹ Diffuse the oils while the kids are online, studying or doing homework.

1. START WITH A LIST.

- First things first: Make a list for meals and shopping. You don't have to plan every single meal (maybe some of you do). Simply having dinner decided upon will help you in your week. Take time on your day off, or at some other point during the day that you can dedicate to meal selections and grocery store sale finds. Either look through the circulars and decide from there what you want to eat OR look through magazines, social media, Pinterest, your family's recipe box/book. Plan out the meals for the days of the week. HINT: If you have older kids or if

it's just you and your significant other/roommates, give them a "On your own" option for a meal or two to give yourself a break.

- Check for meal prepping apps to help! [Yummily](#) has a meal prepping feature as well as a huge library of recipes that you can tailor to your food preferences.

2. STICK to your grocery list!

- This saves you money and saves you from impulse buys as well.

3. PREP!

- Not only should you set aside a certain time of day and/or day of the week for meal planning, you also have to have some time set aside for meal prepping too. When I get home from the store, or at least within a few hours after getting home, I wash off appropriate fruits and veggies. I also even prep them as needed. Something I will NOT wash off prior: the entire bunch of grapes, the whole container of berries. You should wait to wash these daily or prior to eating. They will mold and spoil faster if you wash them all at once. Items like apples, avocado, peaches, pears, etc., can be washed and left ready to eat. Leave these in an accessible part of the refrigerator or countertop, convenience and quick are what the kids are all about.

- Make a batch of overnight oats for a quick easy breakfast! See my recipe [here](#) or check out my [overnight oats video](#).

- Morning smoothies: I found that the easiest ways to get a quick breakfast is for a protein smoothie in the morning. The night prior, I would select my recipe, portion out the fruit/veggies needed and put them in a freezer safe baggie or container, and put them in the freezer. I prefer to have them frozen so that I don't need to add ice to the blender, which can water down the flavor. Have the dry ingredients ready to go, such as protein powder, spice (if applicable- I like to add cinnamon, turmeric or matcha powder to my smoothie) chopped nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butter. That way, I'll I need to do is dump the frozen fruit, the dry mixture and then the milk of choice in the blender and voila! Breakfast is served.....

4. GET the family involved

- Enlist family members to help with prep, where appropriate. This also helps with family bonding and can get kids more interested in eating foods that they normally wouldn't. Many children at least want to *try* what they made, because *they* made it!

5. EXPERIMENT with new foods, recipes, styles of cooking.

- Try out new recipes, new appliances (air fryer, grill, quick cooker, etc). Take this time to broaden your palate by trying recipes that you normally wouldn't make. It doesn't have to become a family staple, but does add some variety into your repertoire. Again, take advantage of websites, magazines or social media to find new recipes.

- For Quick Cookers (instant pot) recipes, you can use them between different models. But read the recipe first! Make sure you have those settings on yours before you prep.

<https://www.delish.com/cooking/g3951/instant-pot-recipes/>

- Here's some fun recipes for the Air Fryer:

<https://www.tasteofhome.com/collection/air-fryer-recipes/>

And Here: <https://www.cookinglight.com/cooking-101/healthy-air-fryer-recipes>

6. Use the SLOW cooker.

- Especially in fall and winter, this makes life so much easier when you can just throw ingredients for a soup or stew in the pot, set to low and 8 hours (or so) later, there's dinner! If you really want to throw a stunner out there- make dessert in the slow cooker! Cobblers and cakes bake very well in slow cookers.

- Here is a GREAT collection of recipes to check out.

<https://www.tasteofhome.com/collection/summer-slow-cooker-recipes/> No, they are not all Dietitian approved, but that's ok! (remember moderation).

7. Make clean up EASY

- Look up "one pot" or "sheet pan dinners". It'll save you a lot of time with cleaning, especially if you do sheet pan and line it well with aluminum foil. You may only need to peel it off and throw it off!

- Here is a great site for Sheet Pan dinners: <https://www.cookinglight.com/recipe-finder/sheet-pan-dinners>

8. IF ALL ELSE FAILS

- Sign up for home delivery meal services, such as Blue Apron, Hello Fresh, Home Chef, Freshly, etc. You can also search on line for local chefs and restaurants that are offering this as well. (Support local!) The ingredients you need for these meals come right to your house, so all you have to do is cook it up!

Remember, we are all in this together! Many people are experiencing a lot of stress and adjusting to a "new way of living" in these unconventional times. Same goes for our children as many are not allowed to return to the school building and be with their friends. Reach out to anyone on the Employee Health and Wellbeing team if you need to vent, chat, relax, be encouraged or lifted up. We are here for you: wellbeing@udel.edu

Be Well, Eat Well, Walk your dog and Bon Appetit!!

~~ Chef Jen



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
EMPLOYEE HEALTH
& WELLBEING

1. <https://centrespringmd.com/the-pediatric-guide-to-essential-oils/> written by: Dr Jamilet Alegria, MD; Accessed: 9/21/2020