



LAVANYA NAIR | ELAICHI ELATION

MEAL PREP

SLASH YOUR EXPENSES | HONE YOUR COOKING SKILLS!

101



1 MIND-TRAINING

Most people fail to realize that in order to meal prep and stick to your weekly menus, it's vital that they leave old destructive patterns behind. (E.g.: giving into the urge to eat out everyday)

2 INVENTORY

When was the last time you browsed through your pantry? It's time to stop accidentally buying 10 of the same item.

3 CREATE A ROTATION

The best way to keep things fresh and interesting.

4 READY STEADY COOK!

Meal prepping is an art, one that you can easily screw up if you don't take advantage of your time.

5 DON'T LIKE REPETITION & LEFTOVERS?

Meal prepping doesn't have to be boring and there are ways to ensure your food tastes freshly cooked.

6 LEVEL UP YOUR LEFTOVERS!

A few extra tips on how to use up leftover portions that would otherwise be tasteless.

BONUS MEAL PLANNING TEMPLATE INCLUDED!



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Lavanya Nair is a financial journalist by day and voracious food blogger by night. Born and raised in the UK, her love of cooking inspired her to launch Elaichi Elation, a blog for all of the culinary delights she grew up enjoying.

Financial freedom is a dream that we all aspire to achieve at some point in our lives. Only a mere fraction of us actually get there while the others are left wondering if they'll ever see retirement.

All of our situations are unique, so what works for one, may not work for another, but one thing's for sure: making small but valuable changes to your spending lifestyle will definitely help you out in the long run.

Meal prepping is one of the best ways to cut costs and it helped me slash my food bill by almost 50%. I know I'm not the first to admit that eating out was pretty much a regular occurrence during my college days. It was one of the many terrible habits I adopted that ended up hurting my finances.

Things worsened when I moved to NYC for grad school and living in one of the most expensive cities in the world called for a huge reality check in regard to my spending.

As soon as I landed my first job, I knew things had to change. If I wanted financial freedom, saving as much of my paycheck as possible was key. Now I am able to save 50% of my monthly salary and I can proudly attribute most of my frugality to meal planning!

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MIND TRAINING

Eating out can have addictive qualities, especially when you live in a diverse and vibrant city like NYC. Here, we have a myriad of cultures that you can experience and each neighborhood boasts mouth-watering but very expensive dining options.

There's no reason why we can't experience that through home-cooking, but first, it's imperative that we adopt the following mindsets to help curb the takeout/dining urge.

BE GRATEFUL FOR FRESH PRODUCE:

Most of us take grocery shopping for granted and as I write this during the Covid-19 lockdown, I feel guilty about the amount of food that I previously wasted since I wasn't planning out my meals or ingredient lists. We are experiencing a scarcity in essentials and while the situation has improved slightly, it makes us grateful for any food that we are able to purchase. Being grateful for each purchase makes you have a newfound appreciation for what you have. In turn, you'll be less likely to waste it. Your bank account will thank you later on, that's for sure!

VIEW DINING/TAKEOUT AS A REWARD

I'm not suggesting that we all banish takeout and restaurants from our lives completely. That would be ridiculous. But everything in moderation is key to living frugally and practically. I set Friday nights as a reward night for sticking to my meal plan through out the week (as I plan for Saturdays-Thursdays). Not only does viewing takeout as a reward limit the frequency at which you opt for it, but it also lightens your monthly spending.

LEARN TO LOVE LEFTOVERS

Many people that I have spoken to hate the taste of leftovers, loathe repetition in their diets and end up wasting an obscene amount of food in the process. A big part of cooking and meal prepping is getting creative and that means jazzing up a mundane leftover meal portion which will avoid repetitive meal rotations. Before throwing out leftovers, ask yourself, "is there anyway I could switch it up?" I guarantee you, the answer is always yes! Keep reading to discover tips and tricks on how to give leftovers a much needed makeover.



INVENTORY

When was the last time you browsed your pantry?



More often than not, we forget about the food that's lying at the back of our pantries and cabinets. It's pretty easy to do so when we're constantly in consumer mode and trained to just purchase what we believe to be necessities.

To avoid buying 10 bottles of pasta sauce and use ingredients that are about to expire, here are a few tips to guide you:

- **NOTE DOWN ALL THE FOODS THAT YOU HAVE IN THE HOUSE (FRIDGE, PANTRY, CABINETS ETC) - (YOU CAN KEEP A RECORD IN A NOTEBOOK OR AN EXCEL SPREADSHEET)**
- **KEEP A TALLY OF THE QUANTITY OF EACH FOOD ITEM**
- **ONCE YOU HAVE ALL THE ITEMS RECORDED, YOU CAN NOW THINK OF SOME RECIPES THAT WILL ALLOW YOU TO USE UP YOUR INVENTORY AND ONLY BUY WHAT YOU NEED.**
- **IF YOU WANT SOME RECIPE IDEAS, VISIT MY BLOG:**

WWW.ELAICHIELATION.COM

CREATE A ROTATION

Now that you have your inventory (which you should be updating), you should have begun to test out a few meals.

You have to strike the right balance between avoiding repetition and tiring yourself out making new recipes all the time.

This requires you to narrow down a few favorites that have been well received by you and your family.

Then, plan out a timetable that works for you! Let me give you an example of how I like to pencil in my meals:

Saturday-Thursday: These days are allocated for meals that I have prepped. I do my groceries on Fridays and carve out Saturday afternoons for the prepping.

I like to pick out three meals which I split into separate portions. I then rotate the meals so I end up eating a different meal each day!

Fridays: I reserve Fridays for takeout/dining out because.... why not?!

READY STEADY COOK!

The whole point of meal prepping is to limit your main bulk of cooking to one time slot.

The length of this session can vary depending on how many people you have to cook for.

Plan ahead in advance so you can prepare your meals uninterrupted.

[I realise this may be difficult if you have young children, but from what I have seen on social media platforms, many moms like to meal prep early in the morning before their kids wake up or during naps] - Do what works for you.



TIPS:

INVEST IN HIGH QUALITY ELECTRONIC ITEMS TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS. THIS CAN INCLUDE INSTANT POTS, FOOD PROCESSORS AND PRESSURE COOKERS.

READ EACH RECIPE CAREFULLY AND IF ANY OF THEM MAKE USE OF OVERLAPPING INGREDIENTS, PREPARE THEM ALTOGETHER AND SET ASIDE FOR WHEN YOU NEED THEM.

MAKE SURE YOU PURCHASE ENOUGH CONTAINERS SO YOU CAN STORE AWAY THE FOOD AS YOU MAKE IT. THIS CAN FREE UP UTENSILS AND ULTIMATELY LESSEN THE TIME YOU TAKE TO WASH THE DISHES [UNLESS YOU OWN A DISHWASHER]

DON'T LIKE REPITITION & LEFTOVERS?

Here are my top tips!

DEPENDING ON YOUR LIFESTYLE, SELECT DISHES THAT PROVIDE A BALANCE IN TERMS OF WHAT THEY OFFER

FOR EXAMPLE: I USUALLY CHOOSE ONE OR TWO HIGH-PROTEIN DISHES (WITH SOME KIND OF MEAT) WHILE THE OTHERS MAY BE VEGETARIAN/VEGAN TO GIVE MY BODY A BREAK FROM ANIMAL PRODUCTS.

YOUR SELECTIONS ARE ENTIRELY UP TO YOU!

CHOOSE RECIPES THAT HAVE INTERCHANGEABLE ELEMENTS

FOR INSTANCE, BURRITOS CAN HAVE A RANGE OF FILLINGS AND GRAIN BOWLS ALSO OFFER A LOT OF FLEXIBILITY.

IF YOU END UP WITH LEFTOVERS, MAKE SURE YOU EAT THEM ON ALTERNATE DAYS SO YOU ARE LESS LIKELY TO GET TIRED OF THEM

DON'T LIKE DRY OR REHEATED CHICKEN? ME NEITHER!

TO AVOID WASTING PERFECTLY GOOD CHICKEN, I LIKE TO MARINATE THE CHICKEN ALL IN ONE GO AND KEEP IT REFRIGERATED FOR WHEN I NEED IT. I JUST COOK THE QUANTITY THAT I NEED AND IT TASTES AMAZING! ONCE CHICKEN IS MARINATED, IT IS SAFE TO KEEP FOR 2-3 DAYS LONGER THAN USUAL. (THE SAME GOES FOR MOST MEATS SO I HOLD OFF ON BULK COOKING MY PROTEINS)

IS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR FRIDGE THAT CAN JAZZ UP YOUR LEFTOVER PORTION?

FOR EXAMPLE, WHENEVER I HAVE LEFTOVER PLAIN RICE, I LIKE TO FRY UP SOME SPICES AND TOMATO WITH FRESH GINGER AND MAKE A SPICY TOMATO RICE FOR LUNCH. COOKING MOSTLY RELIES ON CREATIVITY SO DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT!

LEVEL UP YOUR LEFTOVERS!



Rice has always been a staple for me, so there are usually some leftover portions lying in my fridge.

Fried rice is the ultimate comfort food and the most convenient since you can throw together a few pantry standbys and veggies to make a delicious meal.

The trifecta of fried rice is always ginger, garlic and spring onions. I recommend always having at least two of the three ingredients so you can maximize on flavor.

MUST HAVES:

Dark soy sauce
Oyster sauce
Fish sauce
Sesame Oil

Leftover proteins usually have a tendency to become dry and chewy which can seriously put anyone off eating them.

On the off chance that I do have pre-cooked protein, my go to meals are the following:

- Savory pancakes- I love throwing in some tiny beef chunks with some garlic and standby veggies with eggs, flour (or potato starch) and a touch of salt.
- Vegan grain bowls/buddha bowls - I throw in some leftover tempeh or tofu with some quinoa, steamed kale, hummus, and whatever veggies I can find.
- Cesar salads-Leftover chicken is a major component to a delicious cesar salad. Toast up some chunks of old bread with a drizzle of olive oil, salt and pepper in the oven at 350F for 25 mins. You'll have the best home made croutons!



Meal Planner

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