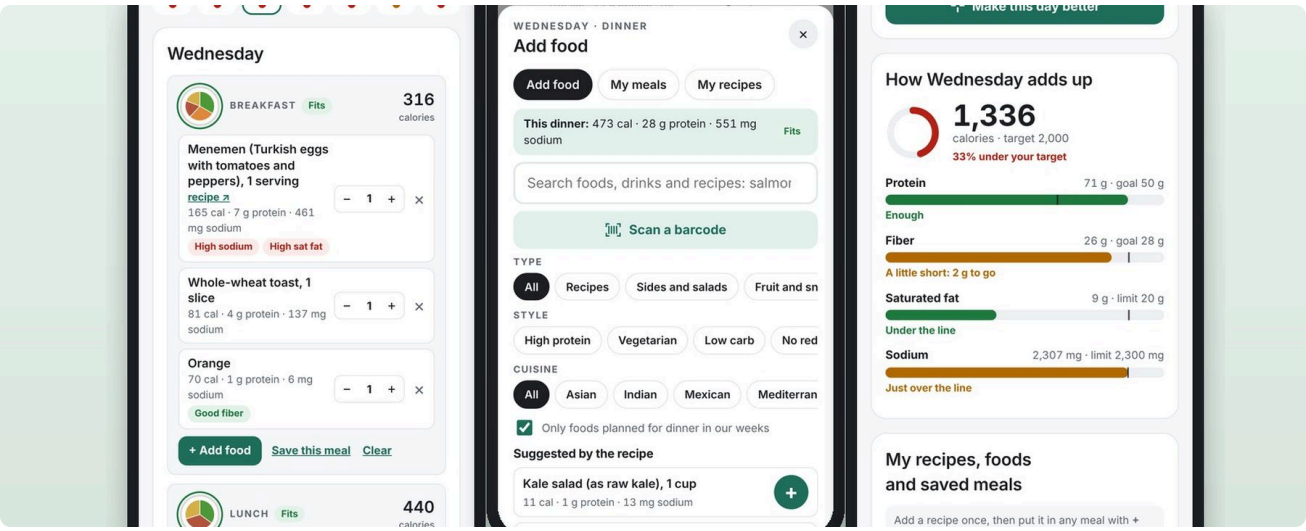
How to use Plan my meals

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Plan my meals starts you with a full week of real meals, then shows what each change does to your calories, protein, fiber, saturated fat and sodium, so you can shape a week you'll actually eat.

Why it matters: Most meal plans hand you a menu and stop there. This one lets you start from how you already eat, swap one meal at a time, and see the numbers move as you go. Results that last come from habits you can keep up, so a plan built from food you already like is easier to stick with (see "Keeping weight off").

Go deeper

What it is:

- A week of breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks, plus an optional extras slot for fruit, nuts or a drink.
- Every meal is a list of foods you can resize, remove or add to.
- No sign-up and no personal details. Your week stays on your phone, tablet or computer.

What it isn't:

- A diet you have to follow. The starting weeks are examples to change, not prescriptions.
- Exact. The numbers come from USDA data and each recipe's own nutrition card, so treat them as close estimates.
- A medical plan. If a doctor or dietitian has given you a diet for a health condition, such as kidney disease or diabetes treated with insulin, follow their plan and use this one only with their OK.

Start in five minutes

1. **Pick a starting week.** Choose the one closest to how you eat now:

- **How most people eat:** the average American week, with three meals out. A good "before" picture.
- **Everyday mix:** familiar American food, a few Mediterranean dishes and one pizza night.
- **High protein:** about 30 g or more at lunch and dinner, mostly from food.
- **Vegetarian:** protein from tofu, tempeh, lentils, beans and eggs.
- **Low carb:** 15 g net carbs or less per meal.
- **No red meat:** chicken, turkey, fish and vegetarian meals.
- **Mediterranean:** top-rated Mediterranean dishes, each with a side.

1. **Set your calories.** Pick **Small** (1,600), **Average** (2,000) or **Big** (2,400). For your own number, run the calorie calculator first; the planner then uses its calorie and protein targets (see "Calories and energy balance").
2. **Look at one day.** Each meal shows its calories and a label: **Fits**, **Close** or **Doesn't fit**. When a meal doesn't fit, a line underneath says why and which food is the biggest reason.
3. **Change what you'd change in real life.** Use **−** and **+** to resize a food, **×** to remove it and **+ Add food** to add one. **Clear** empties a meal.
4. **Check the day's gauges.** "How Monday adds up" compares the day with your targets for calories, protein, fiber, saturated fat and sodium.
5. **Let it suggest one swap. Make this day better** finds the single meal swap that helps the day most. With the Vegetarian or No red meat week, it only suggests meals that fit that style.
6. **Look at the week.** Switch **Show** to **Week** to see all 28 meals at once, how many fit, and how your week compares with the average American's.

What the checks mean

The daily lines (with the 2,000-calorie Average setting):

- **Sodium:** under 2,300 mg a day at every calorie level (see "Salt and blood pressure").
- **Saturated fat:** under 10% of calories. The planner uses the label's Daily Value, 20 g at 2,000 calories (see "Are seed oils bad for you?").
- **Fiber:** 14 g per 1,000 calories, so 28 g at 2,000 (see "Fiber").
- **Protein:** at least 50 g, or the calculator's target if you set one (see "The protein dose").

A meal "fits" when it has 900 mg of sodium or less and 6 g of saturated fat or less (300 mg and 3 g for a snack), and nothing from the "keep to a minimum" list.

- These per-meal numbers are our planning split of the daily limits, not limits tested meal by meal. They make it easy to see which meal is pushing the day over.

- **Close** means a little over: up to 1,300 mg of sodium or 8 g of saturated fat.

The tags on each food:

- **Good protein** and **Good fiber:** more per calorie than your daily target needs.
- **High sodium** and **High sat fat:** at least 1½ times your daily limit per calorie.
- **Limit:** foods the Mediterranean pattern keeps to a minimum: processed meat, sweets, fried snacks, sugary drinks and alcohol (see "Ultra-processed foods" and "Alcohol and health").

Find foods to add

Tap **+ Add food** on any meal. Then:

- **Search** by name. Results include our recipes and about 5,300 USDA foods, as Americans buy and cook them.
- **Type** narrows the list: recipes, sides and salads, fruit and snacks, drinks, beer and wine, eating out or everyday foods.
- **Style** keeps to high protein, vegetarian, low carb or no red meat. **Fits the pattern** shows only foods that keep the meal fitting.
- **Cuisine** narrows recipes to Asian, Indian, Mexican, Mediterranean or plant-based.
- **Only foods planned for dinner in our weeks** (or breakfast, lunch or snack) keeps the list to foods our starting weeks use at that meal. Turn it off to see everything.
- **Get recipe ↗** opens the recipe on its own site. The planner keeps the name, serving size and nutrition; the cooking steps live with the recipe.
- **Scan a barcode** reads a packaged food's label with your phone's camera. Only the barcode number is looked up; the camera image stays on your phone.

Make it yours

- **Save this meal** keeps a meal you like. Add it to any day from **My meals** in Add food.
- **+ Recipe from a website:** paste a recipe's link, and the planner reads its nutrition card. Check the numbers before saving.
- **+ Build a recipe from ingredients:** add USDA foods and amounts, and the planner adds them up per serving.
- **Fill to my target** tops up the extras slot with fruit, yogurt, nuts or milk when your meals come in under your calories.
- **I cook lower-sodium** recalculates many recipes with low-sodium broth, no-salt-added canned beans and tomatoes, reduced-sodium soy sauce and half the salt. Each recipe shows its swaps.

Keep your plan

- **It saves as you go,** on this device only.
- **Save a backup file now and then.** Browsers can clear a site's saved data, especially if you don't visit for a while. **Download backup** saves your week, recipes and saved meals; **Restore from backup** brings them back.
- **To use another device,** download a backup, send it to yourself (AirDrop or email) and restore it there.

If food or weight feels out of control: If you're restricting hard, bingeing, purging, or exercising to make up for eating, talk to your doctor or call the National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline at 1-866-662-1235 (weekdays, staffed by licensed therapists).

Your first week checklist

1. Pick the starting week closest to how you eat now.
2. Set your calories: Small, Average, Big, or your own from the calculator.
3. Change one meal a day to something you'd really eat.
4. Use Make this day better on your weakest day.
5. Check the week view: aim for more meals that fit than last week, not all 28.
6. Save the meals you like, and add one recipe of your own.
7. Download a backup.

Related guides

- Reading a Nutrition Facts label
- Healthy eating on a budget
- Adding fiber and fermented foods

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