

# Cooking & Meal Planning for Distractible People with Jenny Eden Berk, MSEd (she/her)

## Who am I?

My name is Jenny Eden Berk, and I'm a distractible person.

Maybe you are, too.

I've always struggled with meal planning and being able to organize meals for myself, for my family, and in the way that works for my brain. So, I hope you leave here today with some solid, effective, and valuable ideas you could start immediately.

A bit more about me:

- I have a Master's of Psychology & Education from the University of Pennsylvania.
- I have 20 years of experience as a Coach & Clinical Health Educator.
- I have certifications in culinary nutrition, eating psychology, and mindful eating.
- I'm the best-selling author of the book, [The Body Image Blueprint](#).
- And I have a neurodiverse brain – I'm a highly sensitive person (HSP), and I have GAD, OCD, dyscalculia, and suspected ADHD.

## Here's what we're talking about today

Today we're going to talk about:

- The benefits of meal planning and prep
- Why many neurodiverse entrepreneurs struggle with meal planning, balanced healthy eating, and eating rhythm

And you're going to learn:

- My main meal planning method, the Sweet Spot of Nutrition method
- How to use my red, orange, green day protocol
- And how to build the best tools and strategies that work for YOUR brain

## Your permission slip to be inconsistently consistent

The first thing I want to hone in on is that you can be inconsistently consistent and still support your self-care, and your family.

What do I mean by this?

I'm a very capricious person. I like being flexible. I don't like being too rigidly planned. I like being whimsical.

If the girls are saying, "*Hey, let's go out for dinner tonight,*" I'm not going to be like, "*No, because I have pre-cut vegetables in my fridge, and I've already batch-cooked this.*" I want to have that flexibility to be like, "*Yes, let's go.*"

If I've prepared something, but I just don't want to eat it today, I want to be okay with making a different decision in the moment.

In this presentation, I'm going to throw a lot of stuff at you, but really I want you to be able to work through this in your own way using what's best for your brain.

Most importantly is that you come out of black-and-white thinking and slowly become comfortable and tolerate that there are going to be weeks and days that it's just not going to happen.

And that's totally okay.

The most important thing is just to pick yourself up and try again.

Or, maybe you try micro meal planning as opposed to full-on weeks.

Or, maybe you just focus on one meal a day.

Or maybe you just focus on one day of the week initially.

You get the picture. Inconsistently consistent.

## Benefits of meal planning, cooking, & preparation

It took me a long time to even be willing to broach this topic because I am so in the moment, and I have a hard time planning anything. But, I've learned over the years that there are some truly wonderful benefits of meal planning, cooking, and preparation, like:

- Has the potential to save you time during the week so you can focus more on your business
- Making any food decisions in advance means less mental load at night or when you're overwhelmed, stressed, or distracted (this is very helpful because for so many people, it's the decisions that are the hardest part, not the implementation)

- Healthier choices: allows for intentional, balanced, and nutritious meals
- Cost-effective and sustainable: reduces food waste and unnecessary spending

I'm the person who goes to the supermarket and just gets totally distracted and is like, *"There's a new chutney I want to try. Let's put this in the basket."*

Then before you know it, I've lost all my intentions about what I needed to get and what I want to get.

For me, making a shopping list ahead of time has been incredibly helpful, even though it's not natural for me to do it. Making sure I have, at least, a wireframe plan of what I'm going to get while I'm at a store helps.

## Why is feeding myself so hard?

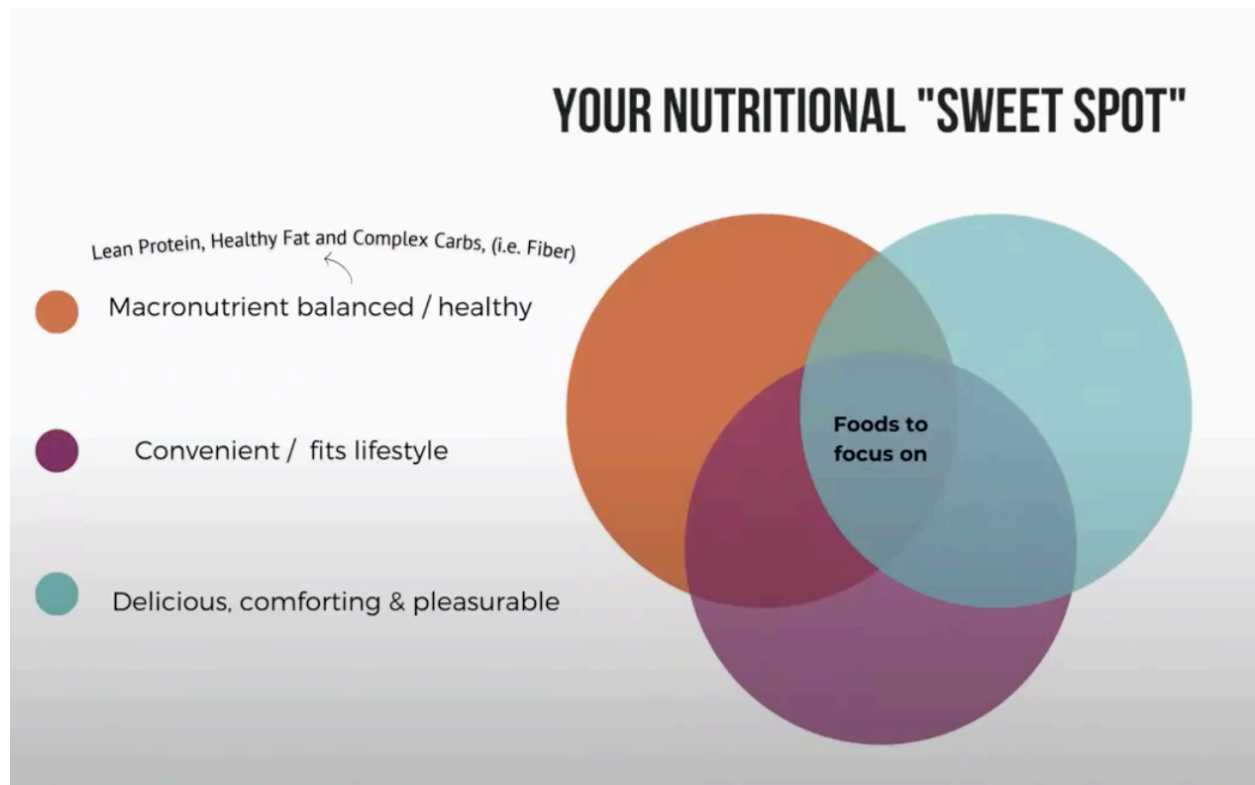
As an entrepreneur, you have many things on your plate figuratively but sometimes forget to put healthy and balanced food on your literal plates.

For many, people with neurodivergent brains, meal planning can be tough for the following reasons:

- Feels too overwhelming
- Lack of time or motivation
- Hyperfocused on biz
- Feeling shame for being inconsistent (black & white thinking) or for not caring for yourself
- Not knowing what you want to eat or not in the mood for anything so putting it off
- Sensory issues related to eating (ARFID, picky eater, avoiding certain textures)
- Lack of energy (for my spoonies)
- Boredom or dreading the task
- Pathological demand avoidance
- Lack of interoceptive cues or hunger/satiety cues until at an extreme
- Decision fatigue or decision anxiety about making the "right" choices
- Diet culture (either having the "perfect" diet or just eating whatever)
- Trouble remembering what you already have or too overwhelmed/distracted to do inventory

**Reflection prompt:** Which reason resonates with you the most?

## Your nutritional “sweet spot”



This is a protocol that I use with my students and clients, called the Nutritional Sweet Spot, and you can use this as an exercise right now!

If you pull out a piece of paper, you can note there are three categories to Nutritional Sweet Spot:

- Macronutrient balanced / healthy
- Convenient / fits lifestyle
- Delicious, comforting, and pleasurable

### **Macronutrient Balanced / Healthy**

The first is macronutrient balanced / healthy.

What I mean by this: the meal contains a lean protein, a healthy fat and a complex carb, like fiber.

*Some examples: roasted vegetables with chicken cooked in olive oil with avocado on the side, a handful of nuts and ezekeiel bread, whole wheat toast with eggs and arugula, etc.*

## **Convenient / Fits Lifestyle**

The second is convenient / fits lifestyle.

In my days at working at a national health and weight management company, I worked with people who had all kinds of jobs, like truck drivers and night nurses and stay-at-home moms and everything in between.

Very often it took effort to find convenient foods that fit their lifestyle. That's something that has to be problem-solved.

## **Delicious, Comforting, and Pleasurable**

The third is delicious, comforting, and pleasurable.

## **Something That Fits Right in the Middle aka You're "Sweet Spot"**

The reason why I picked these three qualities is because very often there is a tilt.

When I was dieting obsessively, I didn't care about whether it was delicious or comforting or pleasurable. All I cared about was that it was healthy and low-calorie.

On the other hand, when I was ricocheting in the other direction, I didn't care that it was healthy. All I wanted was it to be convenient and delicious and comforting and pleasurable.

You're going to find that sometimes you're working all of these, but you really want to find something that fits right in the middle. Even having a list of 10 foods or 10 meals that contain that small part right there in the middle is going to be your nutritional sweet spot.

It's going to be the thing that is easy for you to make.

It fits your lifestyle and your schedule.

Ideally it's going to be macronutrient-balanced and healthy.

It has to be delicious, comforting and pleasurable, or else your brain isn't going to get the message that it feels satisfied.

It's very important that you do not let yourself eat things that you just either really don't like or that you're only eating it because it's healthy for you – that isn't going to be sustainable.

**Reflection Prompt:** Brainstorm these three areas, and your sweet spot.

- What are the proteins you like to eat? What are the healthy fats you like to eat? What are the complex carbs you like?
- Then, really think about your schedule day-to-day and understand for yourself what constitutes an easy win, something that is easy for you, that's convenient, and it fits your lifestyle.

- Then, write down the foods that you find really delicious, really comforting. That could be chicken soup. It could be a good peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or mac and cheese.
- Lastly, find that sweet spot in between and write those ideas down.

## Red, orange, or green protocol

Once you determine your sweet spot, next I want you to determine what kind of day or week it is – a red, orange, or green one.

### **Red Days/Weeks**

It might be a red day/week if:

- You're exhausted
- You have no more spoons
- You're overwhelmed
- You're stressed out
- You're hyper-focused or hyper-aroused
- You have a business launch

These are the days I go for the low-hanging fruit, like:

- Frozen meals
- Reheating leftovers
- Protein shake
- PB and jelly
- A can of soup
- A snack plate like olives, cheese, crackers, pickles, nuts
- Takeout
- DoorDash
- Instacart for grocery store necessities

You could really open up your mind and flexibility to what a meal can be for you. Allow yourself to think outside the box here. You want to determine like, "Okay, I know this is going to be a red day. I've got to go easy on myself."

Some tips for red days/weeks:

- Set alarms to remind you to eat and drink

- Have healthy snacks in your presence, like pumpkin seeds, trail mix, beef jerky
- Pick the easiest meals possible that are still nutritionally dense,

Some examples of what I make when I don't feel like cooking:

- Avocado toast with arugula and pepitas
- Trader Joe's brown rice and a can of beans
- Dr. Praeger's black bean burger with leftover veggies
- Amy's plant-based frozen meals
- Oatmeal with almond nut butter and berries/banana
- Imagine bread boxed soup over Trader Joe's brown rice
- Masked chickpeas with mayo on toast
- Leftovers from a batch cooking session I did on a green day
- Trader Joe's soycutash masala burger with soyaki sauce
- Microwaved baked potato or sweet potato with cheese, red beans, and raw veggies on the side

## **Orange Days/Weeks**

It might be an orange day/week if:

- You feel in-between
- You may have energy and motivation, but not enough to plan for your future self

These are the days I go for easy and quick meals, like:

- Avocado toast with hemp seeds and arugula
- Oatmeal with nut butter and berries
- Scrambled eggs and toast
- Salad kits
- Can of tuna or beans
- Boxed soup over rice

Those are the things that I go for when I'm in an in-between phase.

## **Green Days/Weeks**

It might be a green day/week if:

- You have more energy

- You have more time
- You have a burst of motivation

These are the days I go for more complex recipes, like:

- DIY meal kits – i.e. you portion out ingredients for quick assembly during the week (smoothie packs, mason jar salads)
- Batch-cooking to freeze
- Anchor technique – make something for now, make something for later
- When/Then method – when I make my coffee, I will then cut up veggies for a snack later
- Make decisions for future meals
- Check inventory
- Go shopping for food

## More strategies

### **For Motivation, Momentum, and Progress, Even If You're Easily Distracted, Bored, or Not a Naturally Organized Person**

- Buy in bulk from Costco, BJ's, Amazon subscribe & save (things like beans, legumes, rice, grains, seeds, flour, oils) – these items stay fresh for a long time and can help in a crunch when you don't know what to eat, and you don't have to do inventory as often
- Frozen veggies and fruits
- Canned or boxed veggies, fruits, and soups
- Pre-cut veggies and fruits (more expensive, but a good shortcut)
- Theme nights i.e. assign each day of the week a different cuisine or type of dish – this helps with decision anxiety and for those who want more structure

### **For Neurodivergent Folks**

- Mise en place – this is one thing that changed my life in terms of cooking and meal planning
- Use AI to help – [tastebuds.ai](https://tastebuds.ai), [mealmind.io](https://mealmind.io), [ai-meal-planner.vercel.app](https://ai-meal-planner.vercel.app)
- Use meal planning and inventory apps – Out of Milk, Anymeal, Mealime (\$2.99/mo)

- Make the environment appealing – listen to a podcast, music, audiobook, fresh flowers, clean the space and do dishes before cooking (*try june-bugging technique*)
- Mindful eating / building interoception skills
- Incorporate a variety of textures, colors, and flavors to keep meals interesting and engaging
- Experiment with different cooking techniques, such as roasting, grilling, or air-frying, to add variety
- Decide your plan for dinner before you make any big decisions during the day and when you have the most energy
- Use a meal kit delivery service, like Purple Carrot
- Use visual aids, such as calendars or whiteboards, to organize meal plans and grocery lists
- Use timers or alarms to help stay on track with cooking tasks and prevent forgetting about food in the oven or on the stove
- Break down meal prep into smaller, manageable tasks to prevent feeling overwhelmed – for example, chop vegetables one day and cook proteins the next
- Utilize visual aids such as color-coded meal plans, labeled containers for storing prepped ingredients, and visual recipe cards to make cooking and meal prep more accessible
- Involve a partner or friend – having someone to help can make it more enjoyable and increase accountability

## Determine your stop-gaps

Depending on what you wrote down as your most challenging aspect of cooking and meal planning, I would start to determine your stop-gaps.

Is it:

- Inventory?
- Actual cooking?
- Making decisions?
- Not having ingredients?
- Shopping?

- Not knowing what you want to eat?
- Sticking with a plan you've come up with?
- Rebelliousness?

As soon as you can understand what the major stopgap is, then you can take steps to address that particular challenge.

## What to Eat When You Don't Know What to Eat

A lot of times you just don't know what you're in the mood for.

Here's the six-step process that I use with my clients when that comes up:

1. Determine if it is physical or emotional hunger.
2. Without judgment, tune into the type of texture you might be craving. Do you want crunchy, cold, smooth, creamy, or mushy?
3. Determine what type of flavor profile you're wanting. Is it sweet? Salty? Savory? Sour? Bitter? A combination?
4. Do you want something warm, hot, or cold?
5. Is there a time limit? I.e. can you cook something or does it have to be quick and easy?
6. Yes...and – find something delicious to you that is also macronutrient balanced or buffer it with protein/fat/fiber

## Take this further

Download my freebie, a [500+ recipe database and weekly meal planning template](#) in Notion.

- There's an instructional video for you when you download it, but basically, you can filter recipes based on texture, health benefit, flavor profile, ease, etc.
- With over 500 recipes, you can just drag and drop them into your weekly meal planning template.

Follow me on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter/X](#).