



STRATEGIES TO TACKLE

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

WHEN YOU'RE BATTLING CANCER

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HOW DO YOU TACKLE BACK-TO-SCHOOL WHILE BATTLING CANCER?

It's hard to believe back to school time is just around the corner. Transitioning from summer vacation to the new school year, although exciting, can be daunting and even that much more so for the mom battling cancer. There's a heightened sense of stress and worry about everything that needs to be tended to.

Her days are packed with long hours of doctors appointments (sometimes multiple), chemotherapy and/or radiation, extreme fatigue and a host of other undesirable side effects from treatment. But she too is thinking about back-to-school and doing the best for her family while simultaneously thinking, "How am I going to make it through the day?"

Back-to-school planning and preparation is multifaceted but feeding your family is key. When bellies are full with healthy foods, it paves the way for better brain function and overall performance in school and life.

As moms, we all have visions of relaxed healthy morning meals and packing Bento box-style or hot thermos lunches (in BPA-free materials of course) for school, providing adequate hydration that will stay cold and leak-proof throughout the day and planning a 3-course, 5-star dinner loaded with every major nutrient, five days week. No big deal, right?

While we all strive to do our best, sometimes the 'new school year' energy momentum wanes as the reality sets in that it's not so easy becomes apparent.

If it's not so easy for us, imagine how much more difficult it is when you're battling cancer. Your ability to plan, think and remember even simple tasks can be a challenge. You know you need the nourishment from food and your family does too.



SO, HOW DO YOU MUSTER THE STRENGTH TO DO WHAT YOU NEED FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY?

Meal planning is meant to make life easier when things get busy during the week. However, sometimes trying to accomplish this poses additional barriers. Just think about all the steps that are involved from start to finish.

- ✓ Choosing recipes
- ✓ Having a plan for each day
- ✓ Making a grocery list
- ✓ Going to the supermarket to purchase foods
- ✓ Washing, cutting, prepping in portions
- ✓ Cooking when necessary

I have some different ideas that can help to make things less daunting and I will try to break them into practical tips, tricks and hacks for moms battling cancer and anyone who wants to help them.



GENERAL MEAL PREP/PLANNING TIPS

- ✓ Invest in see through containers — whether for refrigerator, countertop or pantry, you'll be reminded of what you have so you can easily put together a meal or increase the health value of a meal. For example, if you see that you have berries or nuts, you can quickly grab them to add to cereal, yogurt, in a salad or eat as a snack.
- ✓ Stock up on healthful snacks. Healthy grab-and-go snacks are much more plentiful than a decade ago. Vegetables, fresh fruit, freeze dried fruit and air-popped popcorn are great options. Also look for items that have healthy ingredients (e.g., whole grains), are non-perishable and don't have unnecessary ingredients like added sugars.
- ✓ Utilize leftovers and remember that breakfast does not only have to be breakfast foods and breakfast for dinner is a real thing!
- ✓ Whip up a batch of **overnight oats**, they keep for several days in the refrigerator and can be eaten cold or warmed up.
- ✓ Make a batch of **healthy muffins** or **breakfast cookies**. Both will double as breakfast or a healthy snack. You can freeze these and pop them in the microwave. Serve with a glass of low-fat milk and it's a great way to start the day or a quick healthy snack to grab.

TIPS FOR THE MOM BATTLING CANCER

- ✓ Feel empowered during this difficult time is surrender, take and embrace the help that's offered. Remember, if the tables were turned, you would do the same.
- ✓ You needs goals, the "how-to" to achieve those goals and a support system in place to help you carry them out.
- ✓ Make things easy. Many ready-to-eat healthy foods such as Brussels sprouts, sweet potato or butternut squash fries, packaged salad medleys, green beans, sweet peas, mango, pineapple, apples, etc., are plentiful these days - BUY THEM!
- ✓ Keep canned and/or packaged foods like tunafish, wild salmon and beans in your pantry. Look for no added salt options and BPA-free liners. *Note: you can also significantly lower sodium levels of food by rinsing canned items, like beans.
- ✓ Stock up on frozen vegetables. They're ready in no time and the flash freezing process retains the majority of its nutrients.
- ✓ Don't follow a recipe if it's too daunting, there's no need. In fact, lots of delicious creations can often be put together quickly. Here's where the meal prep and see-through containers help.
- ✓ Add your prepped foods together in a bowl. Who says the meal has to be Bon Appétit picture-worthy? I'm a huge fan of the deconstructed bowl!
- ✓ Choose foods that you can easily repurpose like rotisserie chicken, grains, canned diced tomatoes, etc.



TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS AND FRIENDS

Here's where I see caregivers and friends stepping in to help.

- ✓ Organize weekly rotations to help. If multiple people are involved, it can make things more manageable. One person should take the lead and designate a specific week to each friend to help plan, shop, prep and cook.
- ✓ Obtain everyone's food preferences. Even though you know what your loved one or friend generally likes, tastes and preferences may have changed since starting cancer treatment. Be flexible as the patient may not be able to always predict what she wants to eat on a given day. Check with the kids too, as not every kid-friendly option appeals to all.
- ✓ Pull tasks from the above-listed suggestions in *General Meal Prep/Planning Tips* and *Tips for the Mom Battling Cancer*. Take charge, but let her maintain as much independence as possible. By picking up a weeks worth of snacks for her kids (for school and home), that's one less thing she'll need to think about. By helping plan and writing her grocery list, she can focus on other things.



FOODS & 5 WAYS TO REPURPOSE THEM



- ✓ **ROTISSERIE CHICKEN:** main meal, add in for soup, chicken salad, burrito or enchilada, chicken fried rice.
- ✓ **EGGS:** veggie omelette, scramble or muffin, hard boiled eggs for a quick snack, component of salad and egg salad, fried rice.
- ✓ **NUT AND SEED BUTTER:** dip for fruit and crackers, in a sandwich, in a breakfast wrap or quesadilla with pear or banana, ingredient in smoothie, add-in to yogurt.
- ✓ **TRAIL MIX:** quick on-the-go snack (good to take to chemo), add to cereal, yogurt, and oatmeal, base for energy bites.
- ✓ **CANNED BEANS:** add into salads, grains, burrito wraps, soups, Mexican egg scramble.
- ✓ **YOGURT OR KEFIR:** morning or anytime meal, **smoothies**, as a base for salad dressing or dips, soup dollops, breakfast bowls.
- ✓ **SALAD GREENS:** choose whatever kind you like (romaine, arugula, spinach) to have on hand for salad, sandwiches, soups, smoothies, sautéed side dish, etc. Sometimes I use tortellini and add in chopped tofu and a few cups of spinach. It's a delicious meal in five minutes.
- ✓ **WHOLE GRAINS:** side dish, as a salad meal (with a protein), breakfast bowls, burritos, component of meatballs or burgers. There are so many different whole grains available on supermarket shelves and several varieties are even quick-cooking (e.g., bulgar, farro, barley). Trader Joes's Organic Brown rice is a great side dish. I scramble an egg, add in a vegetable (or fruit like mango or pineapple), add a protein (e.g., rotisserie chicken) and a drop of light soy sauce for a yummy quick dinner.
- ✓ **AVOCADO:** in salad, on toast, dip for veggies or chips, base for creamy dressing, fat replacement in baked goods.
- ✓ **LOW-FAT CHEESE:** pizza, nachos, burritos or quesadillas, vegetable topper, and baked ziti.

*Note: keep Parmesan Cheese handy as a little bit adds a lot of flavor. For a quick delicious side dish, add a tablespoon or two to broccoli, green beans or other vegetable. Not only would this be potentially more appealing to kids to consume vegetables, it also increases flavor when taste is off due to chemotherapy.

BREAKFAST IDEAS FOR KIDS



Have with a glass of low fat milk, soy milk or milk alternative (ideally one with protein and calcium) or with a glass of juice (orange or apple).

- ✓ High fiber cereal with berries or banana slices.
- ✓ Oatmeal (or overnight oats) with cinnamon, fruit and a little bit of sweetener.
- ✓ Egg scramble with veggies on an English muffin or in a wrap.
- ✓ Whole wheat bagel with peanut or almond butter and raisins or banana slices.
- ✓ Waffles with fruit and syrup.
- ✓ Grilled cheese with apple slices.
- ✓ Muffin or breakfast cookie with fresh fruit.
- ✓ Fruit smoothie made with milk (or non-dairy alternative). Nut butters are also good to add to smoothies.
- ✓ Chocolate chip pancakes with fruit.
- ✓ Raisin Challah French Toast with fruit.

**Many of the above suggestions can be made in advance and warmed up, even egg wraps are good the next day.*



IDEAL COMBOS TO PACK FOR LUNCHES

There are several ways to come up with a plan. In an ideal world, it would be nice to translate nutrition guidelines into everyday life, however simply combining basic foods (fruit, vegetables, milk, meat/meat alternative, grains and healthy fats), should do the trick for providing an overall healthy diet. Try to include 3 or 4 different items in a packed lunch and vary throughout the week. Yes, I know that's not always possible, do your best.

Consider getting a bento box-style lunch box so you can easily divide items. Note, you won't be able to get away with this beyond elementary school. And yes, add a single serving of hummus with chips or guacamole, a bag of popcorn, pretzels, freeze-dried fruit or a few chocolate squares with the suggestions listed.

- ✓ Make mini kabobs — chicken or turkey with cheese and cucumber and tomato.
- ✓ Turn a turkey (or other) sandwich into a kabob with cucumber in between.
- ✓ Low fat yogurt, fruit, sunflower seeds.
- ✓ Hummus wrap with lettuce and tomato and grilled chicken strips.
- ✓ Grilled chicken caesar salad.
- ✓ Pasta with butter, broccoli and Parmesan cheese in thermos.
- ✓ Leftover chicken fried rice in thermos, fruit.
- ✓ Whole wheat crackers or Triscuits with cream cheese, low-fat cheese stick and pear slices.
- ✓ Avocado and hard boiled egg on a roll.
- ✓ Sunbutter and banana sandwich with berries.
- ✓ Veggie tuna on a roll with melon.
- ✓ Bagel with cream cheese and grapes.



Feel free to share it with anyone who you feel would benefit from this information.

*Please Note: I was not personally compensated, nor was the foundation, by any companies mentioned in this e-book. All opinions are my own and my clients at **Mondays at Racine Cancer Care Foundation** serve as my inspiration.



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