

## Balsamic Chicken and Vegetables

It's 5:00 pm, you just go home, exhausted from the day's work, but have hungry mouths to feed, not sure what to make for dinner. If you find yourself in the "what's-for-dinner?" dilemma often, a menu plan may be just what you need!



Makes 4 servings

### Ingredients:

- ¼ cup bottled Italian salad dressing
- 2 T. balsamic vinegar
- 1 T. honey
- 1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper
- 2 T. olive oil
- 1 lb. chicken breast, cut into strips
- 10 oz. fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1 small tomato, seeded and chopped

### Directions:

1. In a small bowl, stir together salad dressing, balsamic vinegar, honey and crushed red pepper. Set aside.
2. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook for 5 to 6 minutes or until chicken is tender and no longer pink. Add half of the dressing mixture to skillet; turn chicken to coat. Transfer chicken to serving platter and set aside.
3. Add asparagus and carrot to skillet. Cook and stir for 3 to 4 minutes or until asparagus is crisp-tender; transfer to serving platter with chicken.
4. Stir remaining dressing mixture; add to skillet. Cook and stir for 1 minute, scraping up browned bits from the skillet and pour dressing mixture over chicken and vegetables. Sprinkle with tomato. Serve over rice or quinoa if desired.

**Nutrition Info Per Serving:** 269 Calories, 12 g Fat, 2 g Saturated Fat, 66 mg Cholesterol, 323 mg Sodium, 12 g Carbohydrate, 2 g Fiber, 27 g Protein

**Meal planning doesn't have to be complicated. Planning meals ahead of time requires a small investment of time, but can reap great rewards. A menu plan can help your family save money by reducing trips to the supermarket. Also, using leftovers efficiently cuts food waste, while planned buying in bulk makes it easy to stockpile freezer meals at reduced prices. Have a menu plan also helps save time; no quick dashes to the grocery store for a missing ingredient or frantic searches through the freezer for something to thaw for dinner. A menu plan can also help improve nutrition. With time to prepare side dishes and salads to complement the main dish, this can increase the family's consumption of fruits and vegetables. Also, you're less likely to find yourself in the drive-through if you have dinner planned out already for the evening.**

Here are 5 simple steps to creating and following a meal plan, while minimizing expenditure and cooking and shopping time.

1. Scan the food ads for specials and sales. Make a rough draft menu plan with dinner entrees, side dishes and salads that can be made from the weekly specials.
2. Check your pantry and fridge/freezer to see what you have on hand already and make note of anything you could use for recipes on your menu plan. Review your shopping list and note any needed items.
3. Shop with an open mind. Be ready to substitute items if you find a great deal in the store, but also try to stick to your list to avoid impulse buys.
4. When you have your groceries put away, it's time to look at your calendar. Match up meals with what's going on that week, saving quick-fix dinners for basketball night, but maybe a slow-cooker meal for a lazy Sunday afternoon.
5. Be sure to post your menu plan on your fridge door or somewhere you will see it. Refer to it throughout the week as you prepare meals.

With these simple steps you can draft a meal plan, shop from a list, retain flexibility in the marketplace, and hold yourself accountable. Be sure to make a promise to yourself that you will write out the menu plan and stick to it. It's easy to put something like this off, but taking a small amount of time for this can really add quality to your life. Also, remember to start small. If you're someone who rarely finds themselves cooking in the kitchen and, more often than not, in the drive through, planning a 7-day menu with one trip to the grocery store may be overdoing it. If you fall into this category, it may be best if you start by planning out 2 to 3 meals for the week.

A quick go-to weeknight dinner can be a stir-fry. You can get a balanced meal with protein, vegetables, and grains if you serve this entrée recipe over rice or quinoa.