



Family Meal Planning

Step 1: It's all about the plan

Tips and Tricks to Save on Groceries

Flipp app: This app has grocery store flyers and specific store, item, or brand searches. It can be used to plan shopping trips and for price matching at applicable stores.

Cashback apps: Checkout 51 and Caddle app offers cash back when you buy specific products, with different offers available each week. The money you get back sits in your account until you reach \$20 or more, at which you can request to cash out and receive a cheque in about 3-4 weeks.

Coupon sites: There are many coupon sites to visit, and they are constantly changing. Here's a list of sites to explore, the coupon sites are located near the bottom of the list: <https://linktr.ee/livingonaloonie>

PC Optimum Points: This card and their app is worth having. There are opportunities to earn points at Shoppers Drug Mart, Loblaws and Esso/Mobil gas chains. There are many ways to earn points through the program, as well as Facebook groups devoted to maximizing earning points.

On Tiktok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@mac.larena> Mac.larena offers some great grocery shopping tips and advice on using what you have on hand to make healthy meals. This recipe is for lentil shepherd's pie: https://www.tiktok.com/@mac.larena/video/7134477926157815045?is_copy_url=1&is_from_webapp=v1

There is no real right or wrong way to create a meal plan for your family, some will batch cook in their downtime on the weekend, others will plan a week worth of meals but not prepare them in advance.

It's up to you to choose what works best for you and your family and create any kind of plan to not only help you save money but also to avoid the panic and stress that comes with the question "what's for dinner?"

- To make this less "chore like" make a special routine around creating your plan; you can make this a family event ensuring everyone gets their say or go it alone and make your beverage of choice, put up your feet up and plan away!
- Consistency builds routine, carve out some time on the same day every week.
- Consider what you already have; dedicate 1 day each month to take stock and create an inventory of what you already have in the cupboard and fridge. Label and date everything, incorporate the coming up "due date" items into the upcoming week's plan to cut down on food waste and save money.
- Make your grocery list, schedule your shopping day; set yourself up for shopping success by avoiding the busy times. Be shopping savvy by visiting the discount racks first, buying in bulk whenever possible and always take advantage of buy one get one free; even if you don't need the second one your local food bank will always appreciate the donation.
- Be realistic, look closely at your weekly calendar; plan simple meals on busy/long days. Have at least one simple back up meal in case you need a last-minute reprieve! Plan a mix between old and new recipes, start slow using only 1-2 new recipes in the beginning.
- Build your recipe library; use whatever format works best for you but make sure to record them.
- Avoid the dreaded "what's for dinner?"; post your completed plan somewhere everyone can see it!
- Make the most of your spare time; prep ahead whenever possible, clean and prep veggies right after purchasing before you put them in the fridge. Portion your meat ahead of time and always label with a date.
- Be cool, use a tool!! Rice makers, Instant Pots and Crock Pots are great ways to save time. Keep your eye on marketplace for inexpensive "used" models.

Breakfast:

Don't use all your kitchen energy at once, start slow with 2 or 3 breakfast recipes. You can pre-make the rest by boiling eggs in advance or making a large batch of oatmeal and reheating.

Make it portable! Re-use mason jars for smoothies or overnight oats.

Overnight Oats: Add chia seeds and frozen fruit for flavour. Store in the fridge for up to 5 days.

Yogurt Parfait: Add nuts for crunch and protein. Store in the fridge for up to 3-5 days.

Smoothies: Anything goes, add a balance of your favourite vegetables/fruit. Pre-cut fruit after purchase to save time or use frozen.

Pancakes: Make a full batch and divide/freeze for later consumption. Reheat in toaster (i.e., Eggos). Store in the fridge for 3-4 days, or freeze up to a month.

Egg Muffins: Use your favourite frittata recipe and divide into muffin tin for single servings. Store up to 3 days in the fridge or freeze up to 3 months.

Breakfast Sandwiches: Pre-make and freeze!

Sweet or Savory Quinoa Bowls: Pre-make and store in the fridge for 4-5 days.

Granola Bars/Breakfast Cookies: Store in an airtight container for 4-5 days or freeze up to 3 months.

Lunch

Work smarter, not harder. Use up your existing leftovers/ingredients from the night before (i.e., taco meat for a Mexican salad).

Pasta Salad: Make a batch and serve with leftover protein from the night before.

English Muffin Pizza: Pre-make with different toppings and store in the fridge for 3-4 days or in the freezer for up to a month.

Grainy Salad: Give your greens a make-over by mixing in last night's grains. Add your favourite nuts for crunch.

Instant Noodle with Flair: Add your leftover vegetables (cooked, fresh, or frozen) or soft-boiled egg. To reduce sodium, use half the package of seasoning.

Lazy Soup: Use broth base and add in leftover vegetables, protein, spices, and fresh spinach.

Dinner

Consider making single skillet or one pot meals for less clean up.

Double-up: Make two portions and freeze the rest for a later date.

Use themes: Feel uninspired and need a starting point? Think of meals in categories such as, vegetarian, breakfast for dinner, soup and sandwiches, dinner salads, etc.

Points to Touch on

Leftovers: Re-use extra food in the next few days for additional meals.

Grocery list: Only buy what you need on your list.

How to portion out: Stretch your main ingredients per meal (i.e., chicken-themed week where most of the recipes you make for the week are based around chicken). Prepare all your main ingredient at the beginning of the week in bulk so there is enough to use for all your recipes!

Ingredient/Spice: Make a list of must-haves in your pantry to use in multiple recipes.

Quick Easy no stress meals: Such as salads, with options to add grains or protein, or diversify with different dressings.

Thinking Ahead: Making extra and freeze for future use.

Staying Organized: Record your recipes.

General Stocking of the Pantry and Fridge

Before you can cook anything, you need some basic kitchen essentials in your pantry, cupboards, and refrigerator.

Here's what I generally have in the cupboard;

Baking supplies: flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and cornstarch

Cooking oil: olive oil and a neutral oil (i.e., canola, vegetable, or corn oil)

Vinegars: red wine vinegar, white vinegar, balsamic vinegar, and rice vinegar

Canned tomatoes: crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, and tomato paste

Pasta: Long pasta (such as spaghetti or linguine) and short pasta (like macaroni or fusilli)

Condiments: soy sauce, and sesame oil

Spreads: Peanut butter, honey, and jam

Canned goods: Tuna, and beans (black or red)

Dry goods: rice, raisins, dried white beans, lentils, split peas, or bread crumbs/panko

Spices and seasonings:

- kosher salt
- table salt
- black pepper
- basil
- bay leaves
- cayenne
- hot pepper flakes
- chili powder
- cinnamon
- cloves
- cumin
- curry powder (hot and mild)
- dill
- garam masala
- garlic powder
- ground ginger
- herbs de Provence
- lemon pepper (or dried lemon peel)
- mustard powder
- nutmeg
- oregano
- paprika
- dried rosemary
- taco seasoning
- thyme
- turmeric
- tarragon
- vanilla extract

I can't grow much (having no garden), but I do keep little pots of basil, rosemary, and mint in the windowsill.

In the fridge:

Condiments: ketchup, brown mustard, Dijon mustard, chili garlic sauce, sriracha, mayonnaise, hoisin sauce, black bean sauce, hot sauce, jam, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice

Dairy: milk, butter, two or three kinds of cheese (such as mozzarella, feta, cheddar, Muenster, havarti, edam, or gouda, plus a chunk of parmesan), Greek yogurt

Vegetables: changes with the season, but usually at least carrots, potatoes, and onions

Fruit: seasonal

Bread: (often homemade, but not always)

Other: Eggs, chunk of ginger, one or two heads of garlic

In the freezer:

(which is tiny, or this list would be longer)

Meat: Individually wrapped chicken portions, Individually wrapped fish portions, uncured bacon, chopped meat into individual portions, and then put in one big bag, Chicken or other sausage, frozen individually and then bagged (like the chicken above)

Vegetables: Frozen mixed vegetables, and frozen fruits

Other: Butter, several individual meals (like chili or soup), chicken broth cubes (frozen in the ice cube tray, then put in a big freezer bag).

Weekly Meal Plan

DAY 1

Calzones or pizza (focaccia as an alternative), with the side dish fridge clean-out salad with homemade dressing.
*Double dough recipe for freezer (could use some for focaccia side on day 5).

DAY 2

Sheet pan salmon with personalized spice mix, roasted vegetables, and potatoes.
Prep rice for day 4.

DAY 3

Shakshuka

DAY 4

Fried rice using leftover salmon and rice from day 2 (cauliflower rice as alternative).

DAY 5

Spaghetti squash with meatballs using extra marinara from day 1. Optional focaccia as side.
Double meatball recipe and freeze.

TAKE HOME MEALS

- Spaghetti squash with meatballs (plus extra)
- Extra marinara
- Salad dressing
- Spice mix
- Dough

DAY 1: Calzones with Garden Salad

Easy Homemade Dough (makes four small calzones)

If you have more than 4 people in your family, are big eaters, or want to make extra for later use feel free to double the dough recipe.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tbsp yeast
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- ⅔ cup lukewarm water (+2 tbsp extra)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix 1 cup of flour with all other ingredients.
2. Gradually add 2nd cup of flour until it forms a ball. Use your hands to form and knead the dough.
3. Let the dough rest for 10-15 minutes in a bowl covered with a dish towel or plastic wrap to keep it warm.
4. Use immediately or store in fridge for up to 2 days or freeze for up to 6 months.
5. Bake at 375°F for approximately 15 minutes. Enjoy!

DAY 1: Calzones with Garden Salad

Quick Marinara (makes 1.5L of sauce)

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup chopped yellow onion
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
- 7 cups canned plum tomatoes, crushed by hand, juices drained
- 2 tsp each dried oregano and basil
- ½ tsp sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large heavy saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat for minute. Add the onion and garlic. Cook and stir for 3-4 minutes.
2. Add the tomatoes, oregano, and basil. Cook the sauce at a steady simmer for 20-25 minutes or until it has reduced slightly and shows no signs of being watery.
3. Add the sugar. Salt and pepper to taste.
4. Use at once for pasta. Or let cool for later use on pizza and pasta. Can be refrigerated, covered, for 4-5 days. By adding 3 tablespoons of chopped fresh, flat-leaf parsley (or fresh basil) while the sauce is simmering, you will create a sauce with a slightly different flavor. Add crushed red pepper flakes or hot sauce to create a spicy arrabbiata variation.

Homemade Calzones (makes four small calzones)

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound pizza dough (homemade)
- ½ cup pizza sauce
- ½ cup yellow onion diced
- ½ cup green bell pepper diced
- ½ cup sliced pepperoni
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese shredded
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F and line a large sheet pan with parchment paper.
2. Divide pizza dough into 4 equal parts and roll each dough ball into a 1/4-inch-thick circle.
3. On half of each dough circle, add equal parts sauce, yellow onion, green bell pepper, and sliced pepperoni. Make sure to leave a little room around the edges so you can crimp the calzone shut.
4. Sprinkle the toppings with equal parts shredded cheese. Then fold the other half of the dough over the toppings and crimp the edges.
5. Cut 2-3 air vents into the top of the calzone and place it on to the prepared baking sheet.
6. Brush with olive oil and bake for about 15 minutes or until the dough is fully cooked and the calzone is golden brown.
7. Serve with warmed pizza sauce for dipping

DAY 2: Sheet Pan Salmon with Roasted Veggies & Potatoes

Sheet pan salmon with roasted veggies and potatoes (serves 4)

make rice for Day 4 – prepare using package instructions

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lemon
- 1 pound fingerling potatoes, halved lengthwise
- Spice mix
- 5 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 2 cups vegetable of choice (carrots, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower)
- 4 6oz Salmon skinless fillets

DIRECTIONS:

1. Pre-heat oven to 425°F. Trim one end of the lemon, then cut 4 thin rounds; reserve the rest.
2. Put the potatoes on the prepared pan and toss them with the lemon rounds, 1/2 teaspoon spice mix, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 2 tablespoons of the oil. Turn the potatoes cut side down and push them towards one end of the sheet pan so that they occupy only about half the pan. Roast for 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, toss the broccoli and vegetable of choice with 1/4 teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons oil and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon spice mix in a bowl. Rub the salmon lightly with the remaining tablespoon oil, 1/4 teaspoon salt and spice mix
4. After the potatoes have cooked 10 minutes, spread the broccoli and vegetable of choice in a single layer on top of them. Put the salmon fillets on the other half of the pan. Return to the oven and roast until the broccoli is crisp-tender and the salmon is just cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes.
5. Remove from the oven and immediately squeeze the juice from the reserved lemon over the salmon, broccoli, and potatoes.

DAY 3: Shakshuka

Shakshuka * can increase number of eggs as needed (serves 4 to 6)

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp sweet paprika
- ½ tsp ground cayenne, or to taste
- 1 (28-ounce) can whole plum tomatoes with their juices, coarsely chopped
- ¾ tsp kosher salt, plus more as needed
- ¼ tsp black pepper, plus more as needed
- 5 ounces feta, crumbled (about 1¼ cups)
- 6 large eggs
- Chopped cilantro, for serving
- *Optional Hot sauce, for serving

DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-low. Add onion and bell pepper. Cook gently until very soft, about 20 minutes.
2. Add garlic and cook until tender, 1 to 2 minutes; stir in cumin, paprika and cayenne, and cook 1 minute.
3. Pour in tomatoes and season with ¾ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; simmer until tomatoes have thickened, about 10 minutes. Taste and add more salt and pepper if needed. Stir in crumbled feta.
4. Use a large spoon to create a divot in the sauce, gently crack eggs into divot. Season eggs with salt and pepper. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until eggs are just set (whites are firm, but still jiggy), 7 to 10 minutes. Sprinkle with cilantro and serve with hot sauce.

*Optional addition – can of beans (chickpea, lentil, lima) to add fiber and protein. Can also be served over grain of choice.

DAY 4: Fried Rice

Fried Rice *using leftover Salmon and rice from Day 2 (Cauliflower rice as alternative)

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 tbsp sesame oil, divided
- 3 large eggs
- Kosher salt
- 2 carrots, diced
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced, white and green parts divided
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp peeled and minced ginger (from a 1" piece)
- 4 cups cooked long grain rice (prepared on Day 1)
- ¾ cups frozen peas
- 3 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- *Option to add leftover salmon from Day 2

DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat a large cast iron skillet over high heat until very hot, about 2 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon oil.
2. Beat egg with 2 teaspoons water and a large pinch salt and add to skillet. Cook, stirring to form large soft curds, about 30 seconds. Transfer to a plate.
3. Return skillet to high heat and add 2 tablespoons oil, the carrots, and whites of the green onions. Cook until lightly golden, about 2 minutes. Add garlic and ginger and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 1 minute.
4. Add rice, peas, cooked eggs, and leftover salmon if using to skillet. Pour in soy sauce and cook, stirring until heated through, 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper and stir in the remaining green onions.

DAY 5: Spaghetti Squash & Meatballs

Spaghetti Squash & meatballs *using extra marinara from Day 1 *opportunity to make a double batch of meatballs and freeze for later use.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large spaghetti squash
- Marinara from day 1
- 1 lbs. ground beef (or any meat of your choice)
- ½ onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp dry basil
- 1 tsp oregano
- 1 tsp thyme
- 2 tbsp parsley dry (or ¼ cup of fresh parsley)
- Salt and pepper

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven 400°F. Cut squash in rounds and scoop out the seeds. Toss squash in oil and salt and pepper, arrange on parchment lined sheet pan.
2. Roast squash for 15-20 minutes or until fork tender. While squash is roasting, mix breadcrumbs and milk, let sit for 5 minutes.
3. Chop and sauté onions and garlic till soft, let cool slightly.
4. In a bowl add breadcrumbs, herbs, meat, egg, sautéed onion, and garlic. Mix well. Using a small ice cream scoop, scoop meatballs onto a parchment lined sheet pan.
5. Bake for 12-15 minutes. Add meatballs to a pot and top with marinara, bring to a simmer.
6. Using a fork take the flesh from the squash and break it apart. Then, add squash to the marinara and meatballs.