

What's for Dinner?

How to Create an Awesome Meal Plan in 3 Simple Steps



Problem: You know the routine --- it's 5 o'clock and your stomach (and possibly your spouse or kid) is saying, "I'm hungry. What's for dinner?" And the honest truth is --- you have no idea.

Solution: You vow to never (or at least rarely) be in this position again. You follow the 3 *simple* steps on the next couple pages and come up with a meal plan that is delicious, works with your time schedule, and will most likely save you money as well. You'll love it so much that you'll want to do it over and over again --- and you do!



Step 1: Create your Master Meals List

The goal of step 1 is to create a list of meals that you and your family love. Start with 8-10 main entrée ideas, and as time goes on, add new ideas or start a list of side dish ideas. Follow these tips to create a balanced menu plan that works for you:

- Include variety. Consider categorizing your meal ideas into chicken, beef, fish, vegetarian, etc.
- Think simple. Be realistic about how much time you have to cook. Include quick meals that you don't need a recipe for, as well as some that you do. If you need a recipe, make a note as to where to find it (i.e. cookbook, website, Pinterest, etc).
- Ask for input. Ask your spouse or kids to think of meal ideas to add to your family's list.



Step 2: Choose Your Meals for the Week or Month

Simply get out your master meal list and a calendar and start filling it in! Ask your spouse or kids to help pick meals. You can do a week or two at a time, or more if that works for you. Consider which days of the week you have activities to get to and need a quick meal versus days when you might have more time. To keep it simple, you can focus just on the main entrée, and simply add “& veggie” (i.e. grilled steak & veggie, pesto chicken & veggie, etc). You can determine what type of vegetables later based on what's on sale or in season. Here are a few more tips:

- Cook once...eat twice. If you plan to have grilled chicken on Monday, plan to have a grilled chicken salad on Wednesday so you can use the leftover chicken. If you know you won't have time to cook Saturday night dinner, double Friday night's recipe and eat leftovers.
- Designate days. Soup Sunday, Taco Tuesday, Fish Friday --- you get the idea! Having consistent themes for days of the week can help keep things fun and simple while ensuring you get variety.
- Consider sales and seasons. Before choosing meals, glance through your grocery store ad to see what's on sale and what produce is in season. This might help you as you're deciding which meals will taste the best and be the most budget-friendly for the week.

On the Menu

Mon: *Salmon, Rice, Veggie*
Tues: *Grilled Cheese & Apples*
Wed: *Salmon Walnut Salad*
Thurs: *Roast, Potatoes, Carrots*
Fri: *Leftovers*
Sat: *Potato Soup*
Sun: *Egg Bake*

Step 3: Shop & Prep

Once you have your meal plan, making your grocery list is fairly simple! When you get home from the store, prep the fresh ingredients to make each meal simpler during the week. This might mean more time peeling and chopping one day, but it'll save you lots of time and energy the rest of the week.

- **Organize your list like the layout of your grocery store.** Think through how you typically walk through the grocery store and organize your grocery list accordingly. If you typically go to the dairy aisle first, then write that category at the top of your list. If you hit the produce aisle first, put that category at the top.
- **Check sale ads to choose sides and snacks.** If you plan just the main entrée, you can easily add the vegetables or fruits that are on sale for your side dishes and snacks.
- **Don't be afraid of convenience.** More and more stores are allowing people to order online and have their groceries delivered or just picked up at the store. If time is something you'd like more of, give this a try. The first order is usually the hardest, and it just gets easier from there once you learn how to navigate your store's website.

SHOPPING LIST		
Produce spinach oranges sweet potatoes onions butternut squash brussels cucumbers	Bread/PB/Coffee bread peanut butter	Cans/Beans/Soups black beans diced tomatoes chicken broth
Meat/Deli chicken deli ham sausage links	Pasta/Sauces spaghetti sauce pizza crust	Baking whole wheat flour oil chocolate chips
Cereal mini wheats kix oatmeal	Chips/Snacks tortilla chips	Paper Products napkins
Frozen peas bread dough	Dairy/Eggs eggs creamers	Other diapers

A Lil' Shot of Gin:

Here are 3 actual versions of my "Go To" meal lists over the last 6 years. My meal list style got simpler as I had more kids. With just my son, I had a typed list. (Oh how neat and organized, right?!) After child #2, a hand-written list worked just fine! After my 3rd child, I used a list on my phone so it was with me wherever I went. That way I could add to it at any time, and even do my meal plan in the car if I needed to! Find your method that works for you!

~Ginny, RD & Mom of 3 😊



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