

COOKSMARTS

BUDGET

MEAL PLAN



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Chapter 1
THE MEAL PLAN



MEAL PLAN MENU

Home cooking doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming. This weekly meal plan provides 7 days of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners for a family of 4 with groceries ranging from \$75 to \$150, depending on where you shop and where you're located.

M	T	W	TH	F	S	S
BREAKFAST						
Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches (12 servings)	Steel Cut Oatmeal with Frozen Berries and Walnuts (8 servings)	Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches	Steel Cut Oatmeal with Bananas and Walnuts	Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches	Banana Pancakes with Honey Yogurt	Toast with Avocado Mash and Scrambled Eggs
LUNCH						
Rotisserie Chicken Quesadilla Triangles with Celery & Hummus	Hummus, Tomato, and Cucumbers Wrap with Apples	Tuna Sandwiches with Apples	Leftover Rotisserie Chicken Soup with Salsa	Southwest Rotisserie Chicken Chopped Salad	Leftover Tofu and Broccoli Stir-Fry with Quinoa	Leftover Spaghetti with Meat Sauce
DINNER						
Panko Salmon with Honey Roasted Carrots and Quinoa	Cumin Roasted Zucchini, Red Pepper, and Chickpea Tacos	Rotisserie Chicken Soup with Salsa (8 servings)	Tofu and Broccoli Stir-Fry with Quinoa (8 servings)	Meat Sauce with Peas over Spaghetti + Side salad (8 servings)	Skillet Beef & Caramelized Onion Toasts	Curried Sweet Potato Soup with Cumin-Curry Roasted Cauliflower



BREAKFAST



M Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches (12 servings)



T Steel Cut Oatmeal with Frozen Berries and Walnuts (8 servings)



W Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches



TH Steel Cut Oatmeal with Bananas and Walnuts



F Southwest Egg & Cheese Breakfast Sandwiches



S Banana Pancakes with Honey Yogurt



S Toast with Avocado Mash and Scrambled Eggs



LUNCH



M Rotisserie Chicken Quesadilla Triangles with Celery & Hummus



T Hummus, Tomato, and Cucumbers Wrap with Apples



W Tuna Sandwiches with Apples



TH Leftover Rotisserie Chicken Soup with Salsa



F Southwest Rotisserie Chicken Chopped Salad



S Leftover Tofu and Broccoli Stir-Fry with Quinoa



S Leftover Spaghetti with Meat Sauce



DINNER



M Panko Salmon with Honey Roasted Carrots and Quinoa



T Cumin Roasted Zucchini, Red Pepper, and Chickpea Tacos



W Rotisserie Chicken Soup with Salsa (8 servings)



TH Tofu and Broccoli Stir-Fry with Quinoa (8 servings)



F Meat Sauce with Peas over Spaghetti + Side salad (8 servings)



S Skillet Beef & Caramelized Onion Toasts



S Curried Sweet Potato Soup with Cumin-Curry Roasted Cauliflower



Printable

GROCERY LIST

BAKERY

- English muffins | 12
- Pitas | 4
- Sandwich bread | 16 slices
- Tortillas, burrito-sized | 4
- Tortillas, taco-sized | 8

BAKING

- Baking powder | 4 tsp
- Brown sugar | 2 tsp
- Cornstarch | 2 Tbsp + 2 tsp
- Flour | 2 1/2 cups
- Sugar | ~1 Tbsp

BOXED OR CANNED GOODS

- Beans, black | 2 cups or 1 can
- Beans, garbanzo | 2 cups or 1 can
- Chicken stock | 8 cups
- Coconut milk, light | 1 can / 2 cups
- Tomatoes, crushed | 1 28 oz can + 1 14 oz can
- Tomatoes, diced | 1 28 oz can
- Tuna | 1 12 oz can
- Vegetable broth or water | 3 to 5 cups

DAIRY

- Butter | 5 Tbsp
- Cottage cheese | 2 cups
- Eggs | 20
- Extra-firm tofu, preferably vacuum-packed | 20 oz
- Mayonnaise or plain yogurt | 6 Tbsp
- Mexican blend cheese, grated | 3 1/2 cups
- Milk | 2 Tbsp
- Parmesan (opt) | for serving
- Yogurt, plain | 1 cup + 3 Tbsp

FROZEN

- Corn kernels | 1 cup
- Frozen berries, your choice | 2 cups
- Frozen cauliflower | 1 lb

GRAINS, NUTS AND PASTA

- Panko | 1/2 cup
- Pasta, spaghetti | 1 1/2 lbs
- Pasta, uncooked (like elbows, shells) | 2 cups
- Quinoa, uncooked | 3 cups
- Steel cut oats | 2 cups
- Walnuts, crushed | 3/4 cup



MEATS

- Ground beef, lean | 3 lbs
- Rotisserie chicken | 1
- Salmon | 1 to 1 1/4 lbs

MISCELLANEOUS

- Hummus | ~2 cups
- Tomato salsa | 1 1/2 cups

OILS, VINEGARS AND SAUCES

- Dijon mustard | 6 1/2 Tbsp
- Honey | 2 Tbsp
- Hot sauce | for serving
- Ketchup | 1 Tbsp
- Maple syrup | 3 1/2 Tbsp
- Oil, general cooking (like avocado, grapeseed, vegetable) | ~5 cups
- Oil, olive | 2 Tbsp
- Soy sauce | 1/4 cup + 1 tsp
- Vinegar, balsamic | 1 Tbsp
- Vinegar, red wine | 9 Tbsp + 2 tsp
- Vinegar, rice | 2 Tbsp

PRODUCE

- Apples | 8
- Avocados, large | 2
- Baby spinach | 10 oz
- Bananas | 9
- Broccoli, chopped | 2 lbs
- Brown or cremini mushrooms, sliced | 1 lb
- Carrots | 2 1/2 lbs

- Celery | 1 1/2 bunches
- Cucumbers | 1
- Garlic | 14 cloves
- Lemons | 2
- Onions | 4
- Red bell peppers | 3
- Romaine lettuce, chopped and washed | 1 head
- Shallots | 1 bulb
- Sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed | 2 lbs
- Tomatoes | 3
- Zucchini | 2

SPICES

- Bay leaves | 2
- Cumin | 2 tsp
- Curry powder | 1 Tbsp + 1 tsp
- Garlic powder | 1 1/2 tsp
- Ground ginger (opt) | 1/2 Tbsp
- Italian seasonings | 1 Tbsp + 1 tsp
- Oregano, dried | 1/2 tsp
- Paprika | 1 tsp
- Red pepper flakes | 1/2 tsp
- Salt
- Black pepper



Chapter 2

RESOURCES



Bonus #1

10 BUDGET-FRIENDLY INGREDIENTS

An affordable meal is never far away if you keep this list of 10 ingredients stocked. We've utilized these items throughout our 7 days worth of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to show you how to always have inexpensive meals at your fingertips.



1 IN-SEASON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Unfortunately, fresh fruits and vegetables, which tend to be among the healthiest foods for us, can also be the most costly ingredients. To guarantee savings, buy them when they are in season when they are at their least expensive price. Another benefit to buying fruits and vegetables in season is they tend to be the most delicious during this time period.

For guidance on when different vegetables are in season, see our handy [Vegetables by Month Chart](#). You can also see big savings by ensuring that you are using up the produce you buy before it goes bad. Use our [Produce and Shelf Life Guide](#) to know how long produce stays fresh.





2 FROZEN FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

To enjoy produce when they're not in season, buying them frozen is a great, cost-effective way to go. They are typically just as good as fresh and having them on hand in your freezer means you can add fruits and veggies to every meal. Whip up frozen vegetables in no time by steaming or roasting them or adding them to a stir-fry, soup, or rice. Frozen fruits are great for smoothies or as a topping on many breakfast favorites (such as oatmeal, yogurt, and pancakes).



3 BEANS

Dried beans are inexpensive and are ideal for feeding large groups of people or for leftovers. Dried beans can be cooked in a slow cooker with a Bay leaf or two to add flavor. Cover with 2" / 5 cm of water and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours, then drain. Make a large batch, separate them into serving portions, and freeze for a quick future meal! Canned beans are also a great option for a quicker, yet still inexpensive, meal. Use them to bulk up enchiladas, quesadillas, salads, soups, and rice. You can also flavor them with some spices and enjoy as a side dish.





4 CANNED TOMATOES

Purchasing tomatoes (paste, crushed, or diced) in a preserved form (canned, tubed, or boxed) can save you time, money and add flavor to lots of dishes. If tomatoes are not in season, or even if they are, buying them canned is perfect for a quick spaghetti sauce or in a chili or soup.



5 GRAINS AND PASTA

Grains such as rice, farro, and quinoa and dried pasta are easy to buy in bulk at a reduced price and can generally be stored for long periods of time. They are also very versatile to cook with and can be used to bulk up an otherwise light meal, such as a soup or a salad. There are dozens of grain and pasta types which allow you to mix things up and never get bored! For greater nutritional value, opt for whole wheat varieties.



6 POTATOES

Potatoes often get a bad rap for their fry and chip form, but potatoes are actually a nutrient-dense vegetable that can be very good for you in moderation. They also happen to be very inexpensive and last a long time when stored right (in a dark, dry place away from onions – get more produce storage guidance in our [Produce Shelf Life and Care Guide](#))!



They can be baked whole, chopped and roasted or added to soups, or of course mashed and grated too.



7 EGGS

Eggs are an excellent source of lean protein, with 6 grams of protein and less than 2 grams of saturated fat in a hard boiled egg.

The best way to get a deal on eggs is to buy them in bulk. If it's too much for just your family to eat, split it with a friend or neighbor – that way you'll both save! And remember, eggs aren't just good for breakfast scrambles and omelettes. You can also use them to make a frittata, strata, in fried rice or in a sandwich.



8 CANNED TUNA

Canned tuna is another great source of protein that can be purchased inexpensively or on sale. Albacore (known as “white” tuna) and skipjack (known as “light” tuna)

are the most common types sold. Albacore varieties tend to be somewhat more expensive, but some prefer the taste over light tuna. Light skipjack varieties generally have lower levels of mercury than albacore; something to consider depending on how often you are eating tuna. Visit the FDA website for more information on how much mercury is safe to consume.

You are also given the choice to buy canned tuna in water or in oil. Canned tuna in water has less calories and fat, although a majority of the oil in canned tuna provides healthy



monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Think beyond the tuna sandwich and add canned tuna to a pasta, casserole, or salad.



9 ROTISSERIE CHICKEN

Buying rotisserie chicken on sale can feed your family for several meals and can be incorporated many different ways, from tacos to salads to sandwiches. It's already cooked so it's perfect for when you need to get dinner on the table quickly. Rotisserie chicken is a great source of protein and key vitamins and minerals, but can also be high in sodium so be careful to eat it in moderation.



10 TOFU

Tofu is a wonderful meatless source of protein and fiber and is much cheaper by the pound when compared to meats. Tofu is great in stir-fries, salads, or really any dish that you would normally add meat to. **Watch our video** on how to prepare and cook tofu the right way if you've never cooked with it before or you've had a poor experience with cooking tofu in the past.



Bonus #2

OUR BUDGET MEAL PLANNING TIPS

1 BREAKFASTS ARE THE PERFECT MEALS TO REPEAT

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but unfortunately a lot of people skip it. If you have just a few breakfasts that you habitually make and rotate through, you're much more likely to enjoy a healthy breakfast. Select just 1 or 2 to make in bulk for the week and regardless of how chaotic your weekday mornings are, you know you'll start the day fueled.

2 TURN YOUR DINNER INTO LEFTOVERS FOR LUNCH

Going out to lunch every day can be a bad habit for your health and bank account. If you're gonna be cooking dinner, you might as well double and have some leftovers for lunch. Spend a little money on **good lunch containers** and a **fun lunch bag** to make your home cooked option something special. Plus, bringing your lunch saves you time from waiting in busy lunch lines. Use that extra time for a post-lunch walk with some coworkers!



3 COOK MORE VEGETARIAN MEALS

Animal proteins are definitely more expensive than vegetarian proteins. Find a small handful of vegetarian recipes that utilize beans, lentils, tofu, and whole grains together that the whole family will enjoy, and you're sure to see savings on your grocery bill. Plus, eating more vegetarian meals is just better for the environment since raising animals is very resource intensive.

4 LET EACH RECIPE INFORM THE NEXT

Don't just select a set of random recipes. Select one, look at the ingredient list and let that help you select recipe #2, and so on. For example, if recipe #1 uses half a head of cabbage, you might find another recipe that needed cabbage to prevent food waste. Or if you were going to make rice for recipe #1, try to find a recipe that used leftover rice for recipe #2, so you can make once and eat twice! If you need help finding recipes with specific ingredients, sites like [Yummly](#) or [Foodily](#) can be very helpful.

5 STORE AND COOK INGREDIENTS BASED ON PERISHABILITY

When deciding on order, use up your more perishable items earlier in the week. It also helps to store them so that they're more visible too. Refer to our Produce Care and Shelf-Life Guide on the next page to make sure you're storing and using up your produce optimally.



Bonus #3

PRODUCE SHELF LIFE AND CARE GUIDE

USE
ASAP

3-5 DAYS

USE
SOON

5-7 DAYS



- Asparagus
- Basil
- Bok Choy
- Chard
- Chives
- Cilantro
- Escarole
- Kale
- Okra
- Onions, Cut
- Raddicchio
- Snow Peas
- Spinach
- Tomatoes (Countertop)

- Artichokes
- Arugula
- Bell Peppers
- Broccoli
- Broccoli Rabe
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cabbage, Savoy & Napa
- Cauliflower
- Cucumber
- Eggplant
- Endive
- Fennel
- Green Beans
- Jicama
- Leeks
- Lettuce/Mixed Greens
- Mint
- Mushrooms (Paper bag in fridge)
- Potatoes, Baby (Cool dark place away from onions)
- Radishes
- Scallions/Green Onions
- Winter Squash, Cut
- Zucchini & Summer Squash

NO
RUSH

2+ WEEKS



- Cabbage, Green & Red
- Carrots
- Celery
- Rosemary
- Sweet Potatoes (Countertop)
- Thyme
- Turnips
- Beets
- Ginger
- Lemons
- Limes
- Potatoes, Large (Cool dark place away from onions)
- Parsnips
- Onions, Whole (Cool dark place away from potatoes)
- Winter Squashes (Countertop)

COOKSMARTS



Chapter 3

BREAKFASTS

Whether you're a kid or an adult, it's so important to start the day with a healthy, satisfying breakfast. Those early hours of fuel help you stay focused in the morning and tackle the day like a champ. Plus, starting the day with breakfast means you're much less likely to indulge in needless snacking (like those free donuts at the office).



MAKE AHEAD SOUTHWEST EGG & CHEESE BREAKFAST SANDWICHES (V)

12 servings eaten over 3 breakfasts

This cheesy egg bake makes an easy and tasty big-group breakfast on its own. However, you can also use it as a filling for convenient make-ahead breakfast sandwiches. Make them on a Sunday night and then wrap each one in foil. In the morning, pop them in an oven (or toaster oven) at 350F degrees for ~10 minutes while you're getting ready in the morning for a warm and satisfying way to start the day!



BASIC INGREDIENTS

Eggs - 12

Cottage cheese - 2 cups

Mexican blend cheese, grated - 1 ½ cups

Tomato salsa - ½ cup

Baking powder - 1 tsp

Salt - ½ tsp

Flour - 1 cup

Butter or oil for greasing pan

12 English muffins

EXTRAS

- 12 slices of bacon or Canadian bacon and / or
 - 2 to 3 tomatoes, sliced
 - 2 avocados, sliced
-

MAKE

- 1** | Preheat oven to 350F.
- 2** | Beat eggs until creamy. Add cheeses, salsa, baking powder, salt, and flour. Mix thoroughly with a spatula.
- 3** | Butter a **9" x 13" pan** and pour egg mixture into pan. Bake for 35 minutes.



- 4 | Divide into 12 squares.
- 5 | Sandwich between English muffins and wrap in foil.
- 6 | **Extras**
 - If adding bacon, fry them up and then divide each slice in half. Place 1 slice on each sandwich.
 - If adding tomatoes or avocado, slice and add after warming sandwiches up.
- 7 | Wrap in a damp paper towel and microwave for 1 to 2 minutes.



MAKE AHEAD STEEL CUT OATMEAL WITH FRUIT TOPPINGS AND WALNUTS (V)

8 servings eaten over 2 breakfasts

If you've never made oatmeal with steel cut oats, definitely give them a go with this recipe. We use coconut milk for extra creaminess and a little sweetness too (most cans contain 2 cups but don't worry, you'll use the rest in this weekend's curried sweet potato soup!). This fiber-filled base serves as a blank palette for a variety of toppings - sweet and savory. We've chosen frozen fruit one morning and fresh sliced bananas the next, but feel free to try it with whatever you love best!



INGREDIENTS

Water - 8 cups

Coconut milk, light - 1 cup

Steel cut oats - 2 cups

Brown sugar - 2 tsp

Salt - ½ tsp

Frozen berries, your choice - 2 cups

Bananas, sliced - 2

Walnuts, crushed - ½ cup

EXTRAS OR SWAPS

- Feel free to skip the coconut milk or swap in regular milk
- **Fruit toppings** | chopped apples, pomegranate seeds, dried fruit - like raisins or chopped apricots, prunes, coconut shavings, any fresh berry, chopped mango
- **Other toppings** | pecans, almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds, yogurt, honey, maple syrup, cinnamon
- **Other ideas** | chia or flax seeds (cook them right with the oatmeal)
- **For savory oatmeal**, skip the coconut milk (or swap in regular milk) and brown sugar.
- **For a protein-packed version**, top with a fried egg and some chopped up turkey slices.



- **Eat like a Chinese congee**, and add some chopped up ham or edamame. Top with green onions and drizzle on some soy sauce and / or toasted sesame oil.
 - **Enjoy an Italian spin**, and add some chopped up prosciutto and sun-dried tomatoes. Top with parmesan shavings, pine nuts, and a fried egg.
-

MAKE

- 1 | Bring water and coconut milk to a boil in a **large saucepan** or **Dutch oven**. (If you have a **rice cooker**, you can also just combine all ingredients but fruit in the rice cooker, and hit the porridge setting if you have one. Otherwise, just hit cook.)
- 2 | Stir in oats, brown sugar, and salt. Simmer for 45 to 55 minutes, until oats are tender.
- 3 | Divide in half. Stir frozen berries into one half and sliced bananas into the other half. Store in two separate containers or if you plan on taking them to-go and have plenty of Tupperware, divide each half into 4 separate containers and sprinkle with walnuts.
- 4 | To reheat for breakfast, use your microwave re-heat setting or microwave on high for 1 to 1 ½ minutes, stirring once midway through.



BANANA PANCAKES WITH HONEY YOGURT (V)

4 servings eaten over 1 breakfast

Saturday mornings are the perfect time for making breakfast together, and these banana pancakes will have the whole family excited to be cooking together. Feel free to swap in whatever fillings you like, but we love bananas because they're inexpensive and can be found year round.



INGREDIENTS FOR PANCAKES

Bananas, ripe and mashed - 3

Flour - 1 ½ cups

Sugar - 1 ½ Tbsp

Baking powder - 3 tsp

Salt - ½ tsp

Eggs, beaten - 2

Cooking oil - 3 Tbsp

Butter or more cooking oil for greasing pan

INGREDIENTS FOR TOPPINGS

Plain yogurt - 1 cup

Honey - 2 Tbsp

Bananas, sliced - 2

Walnuts, crushed - ¼ cup

EXTRAS OR SWAPS

- **Other fruit** | blueberries, chopped strawberries
 - **Other nuts** | pecans, pistachios, sliced almonds
-

MAKE

- 1 | Use a fork to mash bananas.
- 2 | In one bowl, mix together dry ingredients: flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.



- 3 | In another bowl, whisk eggs and then mix in oil and bananas.
- 4 | Fold dry ingredients into wet ingredients. It's okay if the batter is a bit lumpy.
- 5 | Heat a **griddle** or **non-stick pan** over medium heat. Lightly grease with some butter or oil. Pour or scoop batter onto heated surface and cook on each side until they're golden brown. It's okay if the first few don't come out great! Adjust heat as needed.
- 6 | While pancakes are cooking, have someone else mix together yogurt and honey and slice bananas.
- 7 | Let everyone enjoy their stacks drizzled with honey yogurt and topped with more banana slices and walnuts.



TOAST WITH AVOCADO MASH AND SCRAMBLED EGGS (V)

4 servings eaten over 1 breakfast

This another easy, healthy homemade meal for everyone to enjoy together over a leisurely Sunday breakfast. While avocados can sometimes be on the pricey side, you don't need a lot to add a creamy topping to crispy toast. We love that eggs are affordable and healthy, which is why they seem like the perfect protein accompaniment to round out this meal.



INGREDIENTS

Garlic cloves, minced - 2

Avocados, large - 2 (or 3 medium-sized ones)

Lemons, juice of - 1/2

Olive oil - 2 Tbsp

Eggs - 6

Milk - 2 Tbsp

Butter - 2 Tbsp

Whole wheat bread - 4 slices

Tomatoes, chopped or sliced - 1

EXTRAS AND SWAPS

- **Add dairy** | If you love cheese, add a slice of cheese on top of avocado and put under a broiler for 2 to 3 minutes, until melty and bubbly.
 - **Make it Latin** | Swap out tortillas for the bread. Toast tortillas in the oven, just like you did with bread but for a shorter time. Layer with black beans mixed with cumin, eggs, and avocado mash. Feel free to add some sour cream too!
-

MAKE

- 1 | Mince garlic, and place into a medium-sized mixing bowl. Scoop avocado into bowl. Add lemon juice, olive oil, and



a good sprinkle of salt and pepper. Mash with a fork until you get the consistency you want.

- 2** | Whisk eggs with milk and some salt and pepper.
- 3** | Heat a **non-stick pan** over medium heat. Add butter. Once butter is melted, add eggs and let sit for 30 seconds to 1 minute before stirring with spatula. Continue stirring until you get the consistency you want. Transfer to a bowl so they don't continue to cook.
- 4** | Toast bread in a toaster or toast using the broiler in your oven. If using your oven, adjust top rack so it's as close to the broiler as possible. Place bread onto a sheet pan and broil 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until you get the golden color you want.
- 5** | Spread avocado mash onto warm toast and enjoy with scrambled eggs on the side. Top avocado with chopped or sliced tomatoes.



Chapter 4

LUNCHES

Packing a lunch is one of the easiest ways to save money, calories, and time. We've come up with a mix of easy packable lunches - some fresh and some that take advantage of dinner leftovers - all healthy and affordable. So instead of spending your money on over-priced lunches and wasting time waiting in line, you'll have time to take a post-lunch walk and save towards something you really want.



ROTISSERIE CHICKEN QUESADILLA TRIANGLES WITH CELERY AND HUMMUS

4 servings eaten over 1 lunch

A single rotisserie chicken can go a long way and we're stretching it over 3 meals this week starting with a quesadilla filling. Served with some salsa on the side and some celery and hummus, this is a meal that's healthy and will please even picky eaters



INGREDIENTS

Rotisserie chicken, shredded - 1/4
Celery, sliced into sticks - 6 ribs
Mexican blend cheese, grated - 2 cups
Burrito-sized flour tortillas - 4
Hot sauce - to taste
Salsa - 1/2 cup
Hummus - 3/4 cups

EXTRAS AND SWAPS

- **Make it vegetarian** | You can easily swap out a can of pinto or black beans for the chicken
 - **Other veggies** | Sliced cucumbers, bell peppers, and carrots can all be used in place of the celery
 - **Other dipping sauces** | Cottage cheese (you might have some leftover from earlier this week), yogurt
-

PREP

- **Rotisserie chicken** | Tear meat off of the bone and chop into bite-sized pieces. If you can do this the night before, assembling your lunches will be much quicker in the morning. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
- **Celery** | Wash and chop into sticks. **(Watch our video)**
- **Cheese** | Grate if you didn't purchase it pre-grated. (Can be done up to 5 days ahead)



MAKE

- 1** | Heat oven to 350F degrees.
- 2** | Lay out two tortillas onto a **sheet pan**. Sprinkle with cheese and rotisserie chicken. If you like spice, add a few shakes of hot sauce over the filling. Close with remaining two tortillas.
- 3** | Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, flipping midway through.
- 4** | Cut each quesadilla into triangles.
- 5** | Divide quesadilla triangles, salsa, celery, and hummus into **lunch containers**. For folks that have access to a toaster oven to reheat lunch, you can wrap quesadillas in foil; otherwise, they're completely fine eaten cold too. Enjoy quesadillas dipped into salsa and celery dipped into hummus.



HUMMUS, CUCUMBER, AND TOMATO WRAPS WITH APPLES (V)

4 servings eaten over 1 lunch

This vegetarian lunch is super simple but could easily cost \$5 to \$7 if you purchased it at a cafe. Luckily, you'll save quite a bit by packing this for you and your family in the morning. One challenge with wraps and sandwiches is to make sure they're not soggy by lunchtime, which is why we recommend that you pack all the ingredients separately and assemble during lunch so your wrap is fresh and crunchy.



INGREDIENTS

Cucumber, sliced - 1/2

Tomatoes, sliced - 2

Pitas - 4

Hummus - 1 1/3 cup

Apples - 4

EXTRAS AND SWAPS

- **Add meat** | You can swap out the hummus for your favorite deli meat or make it an addition to the wrap
 - **The paleo version** | Again swap out hummus for your favorite deli meat and instead of a pita wrap, you can use a large leaf of romaine lettuce
-

PREP

- **Cucumbers** | Slice. (Can be done up to 1 day ahead)
 - **Tomatoes** | Slice. (Can be done up to 1 day ahead)
-

MAKE

Pack pitas, cucumbers, tomatoes, and hummus in a **lunch container**. You can set pita down first and place a piece of foil over it and then layer with cucumbers and tomatoes. Pack hummus in a separate small container. Pack with an apple and a spoon to help spread the hummus.



TUNA AND CUCUMBER SANDWICHES WITH APPLES

4 servings eaten over 1 lunch

Canned tuna is such an affordable ingredient and is also packed with lots of good stuff, like your omega 3's. And since no one wants a soggy sandwich, we use crispy cucumber slices between the tuna salad and the bread so it'll still be fresh at lunchtime.



INGREDIENTS

Celery, diced - 2 ribs

Tuna, drained - 12 oz can

Mayonnaise or plain yogurt - 6 Tbsp

Dijon mustard - 3 tsp

Salt - 1/2 tsp

Black pepper - 1/2 tsp

Cucumbers, sliced thinly - 1/2

Sandwich bread - 8 slices

Apples - 4

EXTRAS AND SWAPS

- **Make it a melt** | Skip the second piece of bread and top tuna with a slice of cheese. Broil for 2 to 3 minutes until cheese is bubbly and melting.
- **Other veggies** | Lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, radishes all make good sandwich fillers. Just remember to use dryer veggies between tuna salad and bread to prevent sogginess.
- **Turn it into a salad** | If you're calorie conscious, skip the bread and turn this into a salad. A scoop of tuna salad over some greens with a few of your other favorite veggies makes an excellent lunch too.



PREP

- **Celery** | Dice. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead).
(Watch our video)
 - **Make tuna salad** | Drain tuna. Mix with celery, mayo, Dijon, salt, and black pepper. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
 - **Cucumbers** | Slice.
-

MAKE

Assemble sandwiches by layering bread, cucumber slices, tuna salad, more cucumber slices, and another piece of bread. Wrap in plastic wrap if desired or just place straight into a **lunch container**. Pack with an apple and ice pack.



SOUTHWEST ROTISSERIE CHICKEN SALAD

4 servings eaten over 1 lunch

Throw the rest of your rotisserie chicken in this colorful lunch salad that will satisfy even the heartiest of appetites. Packed with budget-friendly but healthy ingredients, this is a lunch that will leave you feeling energized - no post-lunch slump for you!



INGREDIENTS

Rotisserie chicken, shredded - 1/4

Romaine lettuce, chopped and washed - 1 head

Red peppers, diced - 1

Corn kernels, defrosted and warmed if frozen - 1 cup

Black beans, drained and rinsed - 2 cups or 1 can

Red wine vinegar - 3 Tbsp

Maple syrup - 2 tsp

Dijon mustard - 2 tsp

Paprika - 1/2 tsp

Plain yogurt - 3 Tbsp

Cooking oil - 2 Tbsp

EXTRAS AND SWAPS

- **For extra crunch** | Add crushed tortilla chips or sunflower or pumpkin seeds.
- **Make it vegetarian** | You can easily make this sans chicken. Just supplement with more of your favorite veggies or beans.
- **Mix up the spices** | Paprika lends a peppery, smoky note, but you can also try other spices like cumin, coriander, or even garlic powder.



PREP

- **Rotisserie chicken** | If not already done, tear meat off of the bone and chop into bite-sized pieces. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
 - **Romaine / Red peppers / Corn / Black beans** | Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead).
(**Watch our video** for how to dice red peppers)
 - **Make vinaigrette** | Mix together red wine vinegar, maple syrup, Dijon mustard, paprika, yogurt, and oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
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MAKE

Separate lettuce into lunch containers. Top with chicken, red peppers, corn, and black beans. Separate vinaigrette into small containers (~2 Tbsp / serving). Dress and shake right before enjoying. You can also make mason jar salads by layering dressing, chicken, beans, corn, peppers, and lettuce. Try to keep jar upright and shake right before eating.



Chapter 5

DINNERS

There are so many benefits to home cooked dinners aside from just saving money. They typically have fewer calories and are great for bringing the family together. We've come up with 7 dinners that are easily scalable. Plus, 3 out of the 7 are vegetarian, which is a great way to eat healthier and save even more money.



PANKO SALMON WITH QUINOA AND MAPLE-BALSAMIC ROASTED CARROTS

4 servings eaten over 1 dinner

Salmon isn't necessarily a budget ingredient, but it's packed with great nutrients and can contribute to a healthy, balanced diet. Purchase it on sale and divide it into individual portions, wrap and freeze. Or just look for it frozen, which is often less expensive. This method of adding a crunchy panko crust to salmon will make fish haters love fish!



INGREDIENTS

Carrots

Carrots, chopped - 1 lb

Balsamic vinegar - 1 Tbsp

Maple syrup - 1 Tbsp

Cooking oil - 1 Tbsp

Salmon

Quinoa, uncooked - 1 cup

Salmon - 1 to 1 1/4 lbs.

Butter - 3 Tbsp

Dijon mustard - 2 1/2 Tbsp

Maple syrup - 1 1/2 Tbsp

Soy sauce - 1 tsp

Panko - 1/2 cup

PREP

- **Carrots** | Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 4 days ahead). **(Watch our video)**
- **Cook quinoa** | If prepping right before making, skip to 'Make' step #1 before returning here. Triple if making Tofu & Broccoli Stir-fry. Combine quinoa with water in a **saucepan** using a 2:1 water to quinoa ratio. Salt, cover, and bring to a boil. Lower heat to a simmer and cook until quinoa absorbs all the water, 8 to 10 minutes. Uncover and fluff with a fork.



- **Salmon** | Rinse and pat dry. Slice into individual servings if not already divided. **(Watch our video)**
 - **Make panko crust** | Melt butter by heating in the microwave 15 seconds at a time. Mix butter with Dijon, maple syrup, soy sauce, and panko.
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MAKE

- 1 | Situate oven racks so that you can fit two sheet pans inside. Heat oven to 425F. Toss carrots with balsamic vinegar, maple syrup, and cooking oil and spread out onto a sheet pan. Roast for 25 to 30 minutes.
- 2 | Lightly salt and pepper salmon and divide panko across salmon fillets. Place onto a sheet pan and bake for 12 to 16 minutes, timing so that the carrots and salmon finish around the same time. Give the carrots a shake and rotate pan when you put the salmon in the oven.
- 2 | Enjoy salmon with carrots and quinoa on the side!



TACO TUESDAY: CUMIN ROASTED VEGETABLE AND CHICKPEA TACOS (V)

4 servings eaten over 1 dinner

Eating more vegetarian dinners is a great way to save money, and this meal shows you that you can have delicious tacos without the meat! Latin spices (that can also be used in a lot of other types of cuisines) perfectly complement the sweetness of these veggies. We round out this meal with protein and fiber packed garbanzo beans (because beans are a great part of any budget diet!).



INGREDIENTS

Zucchini, sliced at a bias - 2

Red peppers, sliced - 2

Shallots, sliced - 1 bulb

Chickpeas - 2 cups or 1 can

Cumin - 1 tsp

Paprika - 1/2 tsp

Oregano - 1/2 tsp

Cooking oil - 1 1/2 Tbsp

Taco-sized tortillas - 8

Lemons or limes (opt), sliced into wedges - 1

PREP

- **Zucchini / Red Peppers / Shallots** | If prepping right before making, pre-heat oven first (Make Step #1). Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
 - **Chickpeas** | Drain and rinse.
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MAKE

- 1 | Heat oven to 425F degrees.
- 2 | Toss zucchini, red peppers, shallots, and chickpeas with cumin, paprika, oregano, and oil right on a **sheet pan**. Roast for 10 to 12 minutes, until veggies are tender but still a bit crunchy.



- 3** | Sprinkle with salt and pepper fresh out of the oven.
- 4** | Warm tortillas according to package instructions.
- 5** | Slice limes or lemons into wedges (if using).
- 6** | Let everyone make their own tacos and serve with lemon or lime wedges.



SLOW COOKER ROTISSERIE CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

8 servings eaten over 1 dinner and 1 lunch

Another way to do budget right is making once and eating twice - once for dinner and again for lunch. Soups are the perfect type of meals to scale up (and really you should always be scaling, because they freeze well and are cheaper and healthier than the canned variety). Chicken noodle is one of our favorites because it uses commonly available ingredients and will comfort everybody you serve it to.



INGREDIENTS

Rotisserie chicken, shredded - 1/2

Garlic, minced - 4 cloves

Onions (large), diced - 1

Celery, diced - 3 ribs

Carrots, diced - 5

Italian seasoning - 1 tsp

Bay leaves - 2

Chicken stock - 8 cups

Pasta, uncooked (like elbows, shells) - 2 cups

Parmesan (opt) - for serving

PREP

- **Rotisserie chicken** | If not already done, take meat off the bone and shred. Use knife and fork or just hands. (Can be done up to 4 days ahead)
 - **Garlic / Onions / Celery / Carrots** | Prep as directed.
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MAKE

- 1 | Place rotisserie chicken, garlic, onions, celery, carrots, Italian seasoning, Bay leaves, and chicken stock in a **slow cooker**. Cook on low for ~6 hours. (If not cooking in slow cooker, heat up a **Dutch oven** over medium-high heat. Add some cooking oil and then garlic, onions, celery, and carrots to heated oil and saute for ~3 minutes. Add in



Italian seasoning, Bay leaf, stock, and chicken. Bring to a boil, and then simmer for ~15 minutes.)

- 2 | Cook pasta according to package instructions in a separate **saucepan**.
- 3 | When soup is done, fold cooked pasta into soup. Season soup to taste with salt and pepper. If you have salsa leftover from earlier in the week, you can also use it to season the soup. Enjoy warm with parmesan (if using).



TOFU AND BROCCOLI STIR-FRY WITH QUINOA (V)

8 servings eaten over 1 dinner and 1 lunch

Here's another great budget vegetarian dinner. Tofu is another one of our budget ingredients - this vegetarian protein is a blank canvas for whatever seasoning you want to add. However, if you're still not ready to embrace tofu, sub in your favorite budget cut of meat. However, when coated in this delicious sauce, we promise you might become a convert (and reduce your future grocery bills!).



INGREDIENTS

Garlic, minced - 4 cloves

Broccoli, chopped - 2 lbs

Extra-firm preferably vacuum-packed tofu, cubed - 20 oz

Soy sauce - 3 Tbsp

Rice vinegar - 2 Tbsp

Sugar - 1/2 tsp

Water - 1/2 cup

Quinoa, uncooked - 2 cups

Cornstarch - 2 Tbsp + 2 tsp

Cooking oil - 2 Tbsp + 1 Tbsp

Lemon, juice of - 1/2

Hot sauce - to taste

PREP

- **Garlic / Broccoli** | Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead). (Watch our video on **how to chop broccoli**).
- **Tofu** | If not using vacuum-packed tofu, press liquid out of tofu, using the method in **this video**. Cube.
- **Make stir-fry sauce** | Mix together garlic, soy sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, and water.
- **Cook quinoa** | If not already made earlier this week, combine quinoa with water in a **saucepan** using a 2:1 water to quinoa ratio. Salt, cover, and bring to a boil. Lower heat to a simmer and cook until quinoa absorbs all the water, 8 to 10 minutes. Uncover and fluff with a fork.



MAKE

- 1** | Toss tofu with first part of cornstarch.
- 2** | Place broccoli in a **microwave-safe pan**. Cover with a damp paper towel and microwave for 1 1/2 minutes.
- 3** | Heat a **wok** or **saute pan** over medium-high heat. Add first part of oil and then tofu to the heated oil. Spread tofu out as evenly as possible and let sit for 2 to 3 minutes. Toss and saute for another 2 to 3 minutes. Add 3 Tbsp of the sauce into the wok and toss for another minute. Sprinkle generously with black pepper and remove from pan.
- 4** | Add second part of cornstarch to remainder of the sauce.
- 5** | Return pan back to medium-high heat. Add second part of oil and then broccoli with a sprinkle of salt. Toss for ~1 minute and then return tofu back to the pan. Push ingredients out to the side, forming a donut hole in the middle. Give the sauce a stir and pour sauce into the middle.
- 6** | Wait for it to bubble and darken before tossing everything through. Finish with lemon juice.
- 7** | Taste and season with more salt, pepper, soy sauce, or hot sauce as needed. Save half the stir-fry and quinoa for Saturday's lunch and enjoy the rest tonight!



SPAGHETTI WITH MEAT SAUCE AND A SPINACH SIDE SALAD

8 servings eaten over 1 dinner and 1 lunch

Who doesn't love spaghetti and meat sauce? This classic is comforting and also very budget friendly! Ground meat is cheaper when purchased in bulk, which is why we use across two meals. If you still have more leftover, you can also freeze the extra. We sneak in a good amount of veggies into our meat sauce to bulk it up without having to use as much meat, which is healthier and cheaper too!



INGREDIENTS

Spaghetti

Lean ground beef - 2 lbs
Red pepper flakes - 1/2 tsp
Italian seasoning - 1 Tbsp
Salt - 1 tsp
Black pepper - 1/2 tsp
Garlic cloves, peeled - 4
Onions, rough-chopped - 1
Carrots, peeled and rough-chopped - 2
Celery - 2 stalks
Crushed tomatoes - 1 28 oz can + 1 14 oz can
Diced tomatoes - 1 28 oz can
Cooking oil - 1 Tbsp
Spaghetti - 1 1/2 lbs
Parmesan (opt) - for serving

Salad

Red wine vinegar - 1 1/2 Tbsp
Dijon mustard - 2 tsp
Cooking oil - 3 Tbsp
Baby spinach - 5 oz

PREP

- **Make pasta** | Bring a **saucepan** of water to boil. Salt generously and add pasta. Cook until al dente, tender but not soggy. Drain. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)



- **Season meat** | Mix together ground meat, red pepper flakes, Italian seasoning, salt, black pepper. (Can be done up to 1 day ahead)
 - **Garlic / Onions / Carrots / Celery** | Rough chop and then puree in a blender, **food processor** or with an **immersion blender**. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)
 - **Diced tomatoes** | Drain.
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MAKE

- 1 | Heat a **Dutch oven** over medium-high heat. Add oil and then meat to heated oil.
- 2 | Use a **wooden spoon** to break meat up into bits. Brown for 4 to 6 minutes.
- 3 | Fold in your veggie puree and saute for another 3 to 4 minutes.
- 4 | Add crushed tomatoes and diced tomatoes. Boil and then simmer uncovered (be careful of spattering or just embrace it and clean up later) for 15 to 20 minutes.
- 5 | While sauce is cooking, whisk together red wine vinegar, Dijon, and cooking oil. Salt and pepper vinaigrette to taste.
- 6 | When sauce is done simmering, taste and then season with more spices, salt, and or / pepper. If the sauce tastes too tart or acidic, temper it with something sweet like sugar.
- 7 | Divide pasta into bowls and plates and let everyone spoon as much sauce as they want over pasta. Serve with as much parmesan as you want and enjoy with side spinach salads.



SKILLET BEEF & CARMELIZED ONION TOASTS

4 servings eaten over 1 dinner

We use ground meat (though the title says beef, use whatever type you like best) again for this Saturday night dinner. Caramelized onions are an inexpensive way to add a lot of flavor without spending a lot of money. Plus, they'll add a creaminess to this meal. Enjoy with a spinach salad for some green in your meal.



INGREDIENTS

Onions (large), sliced - 1
Brown or cremini mushrooms, sliced - 1 lb
Lean ground beef - 1 lb
Soy sauce - 1 Tbsp
Ketchup - 1 Tbsp
Dijon mustard - 2 tsp
Garlic powder - 1 1/2 tsp
Black pepper - 1/2 tsp
Cooking oil - 1 Tbsp
Red wine vinegar - 2 tsp
Sugar - 1/2 tsp
Sandwich bread, toasted - 4 slices

Salad

Red wine vinegar - 1 1/2 Tbsp
Dijon mustard - 2 tsp
Cooking oil - 3 Tbsp
Baby spinach - 5 oz

PREP

- **Onions / Mushrooms** | Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead). (Watch our video for how to **slice an onion**).
- **Beef** | Season with soy sauce, ketchup, Dijon, garlic powder, and black pepper. (Can be done up to 1 day ahead)
- **Vinaigrette** | Whisk red wine vinegar, Dijon, and cooking oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper.



MAKE

- 1** | Heat a **skillet** over medium heat for onions. Add cooking oil and then add onions with a sprinkle of salt. Saute for 8 to 10 minutes, until very tender. If the pan ever looks too dry, add a splash of liquid. Add red wine vinegar and sugar. Saute for another 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from pan and set aside.
- 2** | Return skillet to burner and heat over medium-high heat. Add ground beef to heated pan, breaking up with a wooden spoon. Brown for ~5 minutes.
- 3** | While meat is browning, start to toast your bread.
- 4** | Fold mushrooms into beef and saute mushrooms until tender.
- 5** | Taste and season with salt and pepper or any of the other ingredients.
- 6** | Toss spinach with vinaigrette. Layer toast with beef and mushrooms and caramelized onions. Eat with a fork and knife!



CURRIED SWEET POTATO SOUP WITH CURRY-CUMIN ROASTED CAULIFLOWER (V)

4 servings eaten over 1 dinner

Pureed vegetable soups are another easy budget meal that satisfy and are also very healthy. Sweet potatoes have so much flavor on their own that you don't need to do a whole lot to season it. Served with a side of roasted veggies, you have another easy vegetarian meal to end the week with.



INGREDIENTS

Soup

Onions (large), chopped - 1

Sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed - 2 lbs

Light coconut milk - 1 cup

Curry powder - 1 Tbsp

Ground ginger (opt) - 1/2 Tbsp

Vegetable broth or water - 3 to 5 cups

Roasted Cauliflower

Frozen cauliflower - 1 lb

Cooking oil - 1 Tbsp

Cumin - 1 tsp

Curry powder - 1 tsp

PREP

- **Onions / Sweet potatoes** | Prep as directed. (Can be done up to 3 days ahead)

MAKE

- 1 | Heat oven to 425F degrees.
- 2 | Toss cauliflower with oil, cumin, and curry powder right onto a **sheet pan**. Spread out into an even layer and roast for 25 minutes, shaking once midway through.
- 3 | While cauliflower roasts, heat a **Dutch oven** or pot over



medium-high heat. Add coconut milk (you should have some leftover from the oatmeal you made earlier in the week).

- 4 | Once coconut milk starts to bubble, add onions with a sprinkle of salt. Saute until softened, ~3 minutes.
- 5 | Add sweet potatoes, curry powder and ground ginger (if using). Saute for another minute.
- 6 | Add enough broth or water to cover all the ingredients. Cover and bring to a boil. Simmer for 10 to 12 minutes, until sweet potatoes can be easily pierced with a fork.
- 7 | Puree in batches in a **blender** or use an **immersion blender** directly in the pot until smooth.
- 8 | Season soup to taste with salt and pepper. Finish cauliflower fresh out of the oven with more salt and pepper. Enjoy cauliflower as a side dish or fold it right into your creamy soup.



Even if not every meal on this meal plan works for your needs, definitely use the tips we've offered to create your own customized plan. Regardless of your food budget, setting a meal plan every week is one of the best ways to be saving more in the kitchen—that goes for money and food waste!

If you're interested in having us do it for you every week, we invite you to experience the impact of meal planning every week with our **meal plan service**.

To get more tips on how to cook on a budget, visit **[cooksmarts.com/budget](https://www.cooksmarts.com/budget)**



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