



FREE
GUIDE

Meal Prep Made Easier

7 Simple, Real-Life Tips That Actually Help



Simple ideas to make mealtime easier—
without turning meal prep into a full-time job.



COOKING
WITH
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A Note From Melanie

If you've ever thought, "I really should meal prep..." and then immediately decided you had better things to do — this guide is for you.

Meal prep does not have to mean spending your entire Sunday cooking, filling a dozen containers, or eating the exact same meal four days in a row. It can be as simple as doing a few small things now that make dinner easier later. Start with one or two ideas that make sense for your life. That's it.

1. Forget the All-or-Nothing Approach

You do not have to prep an entire week of meals for meal prep to count.

Cook some extra chicken.

Brown taco meat ahead of time.

Chop tomorrow night's vegetables while you're already in the kitchen.

Even one thing done ahead is one less thing you have to deal with when you're tired and trying to figure out dinner. Meal prep can be small and still be helpful.

2. Prep Ingredients, Not Full Meals

Not excited about eating the same casserole three nights in a row? You don't have to. Instead of prepping complete meals, prep ingredients you can use in different ways.

Try prepping:

- Cooked chicken
- Taco meat
- Chopped or roasted vegetables
- Rice or pasta
- Washed fruit
- Shredded cheese

Now you have pieces of dinner ready to go without locking yourself into one meal. Cooked chicken might become tacos one night and pasta another. Chopped vegetables might go into a sheet pan dinner, quesadillas, or scrambled eggs. A little prep gives you options.

Food safety note: Refrigerate cooked foods promptly and use most cooked leftovers within 3–4 days, or freeze them for later.

3. Pick Just 2 Things to Prep

Not 21 meals. Not an entire week. Just **two** things that would make your week easier.

Maybe that's:

- One protein you can use for multiple meals
- Vegetables washed and chopped
- One easy lunch option
- A dinner ingredient cooked ahead
- Snacks portioned and ready to grab

Think about the part of mealtime that usually slows you down — and prep that. You don't need to prep everything. You just need to make something easier.

4. Cook Once, Use It Twice

If you're already cooking, making a little extra usually takes very little additional effort.

The trick is using it in a different way so it doesn't feel like you're eating the exact same leftovers again.

For example:

- Extra chicken → chicken tacos + chicken salad
- Extra taco meat → tacos + nachos
- Extra roasted vegetables → dinner side + pasta
- Extra shredded pork or beef → sandwiches + quesadillas

You're not cooking two dinners. You're giving yourself a head start on the next one.

5. Give Yourself a 20-Minute Head Start

You do not need a three-hour Sunday meal-prep marathon. Set aside 20 minutes and do whatever will help Future You the most.

You could:

- Wash fruit
- Chop vegetables
- Brown ground meat
- Cook one protein
- Portion snacks
- Shred cheese
- Check what needs to be used in the fridge

Twenty minutes now can make a busy weeknight feel a whole lot easier.

And if you only get one thing done? That still counts.

6. Keep a No-Thought-Required Dinner List

Some nights, the hardest part of dinner isn't actually cooking. It's deciding what to make. Create a short list of dinners your family already likes that you can make without searching for a recipe or thinking too hard.

A few ideas:

- Tacos
- Pasta + sauce
- Quesadillas
- Sheet pan dinner
- Breakfast for dinner
- Ravioli or tortellini
- Sandwiches or wraps

Keep your list somewhere easy to find.

When your brain is done for the day, pick one and move on.

No scrolling. No overthinking. Just dinner.

7. Let Your Freezer Help

Your freezer can be one of your best backup plans. When you're already making something freezer-friendly, make a little extra.

You can:

- Double a recipe and freeze half
- Freeze extra cooked meat in meal-size portions
- Freeze individual portions of leftovers
- Prep freezer-friendly ingredients for a future meal and freeze them together

You don't have to fill your freezer with 20 perfectly labeled meals.

Even one dinner waiting in the freezer can save you on a night when everything goes sideways.

The Goal Isn't Perfect Meal Prep

The goal is:

Fewer:

"What am I going to make for dinner?"

Fewer:

"I guess we're getting takeout again."

More:

"Oh good — I already have something started."

Meal prep doesn't have to be extreme to make a difference.

Start small. Stay flexible.

Prep the things that actually make your life easier. Because the best meal-prep system is the one you'll actually use.

Try This This Week

Don't try to do all seven tips.

Choose ONE:

- Cook extra protein while making dinner.
- Chop vegetables for two upcoming meals.
- Write down three no-thought-required dinners.
- Spend 20 minutes prepping a few ingredients.
- Make extra of something you're already cooking and freeze it.

Small steps can make busy weeknights a whole lot easier.

BONUS: Easy Grocery Shortcuts

Using shortcuts is not cheating. Sometimes the thing that gets dinner on the table is starting with an ingredient that has already done some of the work for you.

A few easy options:

Frozen Meatballs: Add them to pasta, make meatball subs, toss them into a quick sauce, or serve them with an easy side.

Refrigerated or Frozen Ravioli or Tortellini: They cook in minutes and can become an easy dinner with sauce, vegetables, or a simple salad.

Frozen Vegetables: No washing. No chopping. Use exactly what you need and put the rest back in the freezer.

Fully Cooked Frozen Chicken Strips: Keep some on hand for quick wraps, salads, pasta, quesadillas, or other last-minute meals.

The best shortcut is the one that helps you get dinner on the table without adding more stress.

Want a Little More Help With Dinner?



If deciding what to make is usually the hardest part, I can help with that too.

Join my FREE Recipe Club and get one simple, real-life dinner idea delivered each week.

Easy recipes. Practical shortcuts. Dinner ideas made for real life.

Join the Recipe Club at cookingwithmelanie.com/weekly-recipe-sign-up

I hope this guide helps make mealtime feel a little easier and gives you a few ideas you can actually use in real life.

Remember, you don't have to prep everything. Even one small thing done ahead can make a busy night easier.

Here's to less stress, fewer last-minute dinner decisions, and more meals that work for your real life. 💜

Melanie

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Making mealtimes easier

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