

Perpetually
Prepped
Kitchen

The Simple Method for
Meals in Minutes

Jennifer Mason

Perpetually Prepped Kitchen

The Simple Method for Meals in Minutes

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Hi! I'm Jen, and I just wanted to say thank you for purchasing, "Perpetually Prepped Kitchen." I'm so excited to share this method with you – it's truly been a labor of love! My goal is to make it as easy as possible for you to eat well at home, even on those nights that you're too busy and too tired to cook. My hope is that this book saves you time and money and helps you make healthier choices when life is busy. Please stop by workingathomeschool.com to say hi or access my many available free meal planning resources!

 Jen

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INTRODUCTION

What if I told you that you could get dinner on the table in just a few minutes when you're too busy or too tired to cook? That you could switch your family's dinner default from fast food, take out, or cereal to healthy, delicious meals that take very little time and energy in the kitchen? What if you could always feed your family well, no matter what kind of busy schedule you have?

It can be done. I'll show you how to simplify your meals so you can always have something easy, delicious, and ready to go in just a few minutes. Even better, I'll show you how to have a foolproof back-up plan for busy nights. Keeping your kitchen perpetually prepped for quick dinners can help you save time, money, and energy - and it's easier than you might think!

If you had asked me two years ago how often my family defaults to eating out or junk food at home I would have shrugged and said, "Not too often." It wasn't until I sat down to work on our budget that I realized we were eating out far, FAR more than my budget allowed. At one point we were eating out 4-6 times per week! And not only was eating out so often impacting our finances, it was also slowly adding on a few extra pounds that I'd worked so hard to lose the previous year.

I love to meal plan (I'm a planner, it's just my personality), so I'd spend time putting together amazing meal plans that I'd share on my website (workingathomeschool.com) – just to find that I only used a handful of the meals on the meal plan! I started to wonder what good it was to make these meal plans and shopping lists if we didn't get to enjoy the yummy dinners. The ingredients I'd bought collected dust in my pantry or went bad in my refrigerator. What a waste!

Most often, it would be that we were out and about around dinner time, realized it was getting late, and decided to drive through for a quick meal. Other times I would already be at home, but just too exhausted to cook. And probably third in excuses for me was that I was just too busy. I'd only have 15 minutes at home around dinner time, which meant it was pretty much impossible to feed my 5 kids and get them loaded back into the car on time.

These things happen to everyone! I believe most Americans eat out more than they'd like to (or more than they can afford to), and I've found that most busy moms just run into things that make it difficult to eat every meal at home.

Since developing the Perpetually Prepped Method, my family has nearly completely stopped eating out unless we plan to ahead of time. I've saved well over \$200 a month with just a little prep – and I use these dinner ideas for lunches, too! I now keep a well-stocked pantry, with multiple meals organized and ready to go, and I know that if I have even as little as five minutes I can put a nutritious meal on the table. Even better, those 5 minutes will be easy – little to no chopping, no racing around the kitchen, just simple steps to a simple meal that the whole family will enjoy.

The last time we ate out was for my daughter's birthday, planned and budgeted for in advance, and it was more enjoyable because we weren't breaking the bank or making unhealthy eating choices at the last minute. These small changes in my kitchen have made an amazing difference for our finances, our health, my weight loss (yay!), and daily schedule.

In Perpetually Prepped Kitchen, you'll learn the Perpetually Prepped Method – how it works, the benefits, and the different ways to use it to save time and money. I'll help you set goals for using the system in your home, and outline the steps you need to make those goals a reality. I'll also help you develop an easy, 30-day prep schedule to ensure that you're never caught without a simple dinner back-up plan.

How can you change the default for your family? I'll show you how to be Perpetually Prepped for anything in your kitchen!

Part I

The Perpetually Prepped Kitchen

Why Keep a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen?

When dinner time rolls around, I often find myself out of the house. I could be running errands, picking up a child from soccer practice, heading home from an appointment, or any number of things. When I'm out of the house at 5:30 or 6:00, a homemade dinner sounds like an impossible task. Everyone is hungry *now*, and heading home to cook dinner is just one more thing on the list. I often start a mental tally of my minutes: 15 minutes to get home, 5 minutes to unload the kids, 30 minutes more until I can have a meal on the table....and then I want to give up! We don't want to wait nearly an hour to eat dinner when it's already dinner time!

**Eat by design...
not by default!**

My ability to cook when I'm tired and worn out is another frequent factor in this equation. When it's time to make a meal, I'm often just too tired to get into the kitchen and put something together. I've noticed that during seasons of life

when I've worked out of the house or from home, I seem to hit a wall at around 6pm. Too exhausted to do any more work, I often default to bowls of cereal, DIY dinner for the bigger kids and snacks for the little ones, or takeout.

For many years, I wanted to be more intentional about healthy meals in our home, but I didn't know where to start. I knew I wanted to make better food choices, I knew I was wasting food, and I knew we ate out too much. Beyond identifying those problems, I felt stuck. I remember pulling up to a drive through and ordering kids' meals for the third time in one week with a healthy dose of mommy guilt on the side. I knew it wasn't the best choice, but I also felt like it was the best I could do for that day.

I was partly right – sometimes drive through meals and last-minute fast food IS the best I can do! And it is totally OK for that to happen occasionally. But I think the primary reason I did that so often was that I didn't think there was another way. I didn't have enough time or energy to make an elaborate meal. I didn't think it was possible to go home, unload the kids, and feed them the healthy meal I'd planned for that day, so I didn't even try.

I think it was critical for me to identify that for myself, driving through when we were out had become a habit. When I realized how much it was costing us, I knew that bad habits can be broken and good ones developed in their place. Instead of that not-so-great dinnertime rush default of eating out or eating junk food at home, I could create a habit of an easy meal to fall back on in those times – and I did!

The Perpetually Prepped approach came into existence when I determined to eat a healthy meal at home for every single meal for a whole month. I know this would be easy for some people, but it wasn't for me! It's not like our everyday stresses and busy schedules disappeared that month. No, we went right on with homeschooling and work and cleaning and soccer and every single other thing that was piled up in life.

The first week, I struggled. It was this week that showed me how often I ditched our meal plan. When I couldn't get to the dinner I'd planned to eat, we defaulted to cereal and boxed macaroni and cheese three times that week for dinner. And I was OK with that, because I was developing a new habit of eating at home. I still had the problem of underutilizing my meal plan, and wasting some food that I couldn't get to for dinner,

but at least I had a new habit of heading home after soccer practice instead of stopping for food on the way. That was a win!

In week 2, I bought a rotisserie chicken and started defaulting to that with salad or a side of rice instead of convenience foods. It wasn't a super exciting meal, but it was another win! By eating a healthier meal at home, I was technically meeting my goal. The only problem was that the rice would take a long time to cook, and when we came home hungry the kids would start snacking and wouldn't want to eat dinner by the time it was ready.

This was a lightbulb moment – I could make that meal even faster by making rice ahead of time. So, I did! And then a second, brighter lightbulb – what if I could skip the rice entirely and come up with meals that took just a few minutes to put together from start to finish?

I started cooking and developing super quick, pantry-ready meals. I realized that it took about 28 minutes to load the kids into the car, get to a fast food place, go through the drive through, and get home. Now I had a time to beat! I put together a list of 20-minute meals at home, and I felt very accomplished. I now had a healthy, fast default that was quicker than eating out.

Those 20 minutes didn't *always* work. Sometimes a 20-minute meal is great! But other times even just those 20 minutes felt daunting - especially when we were out of the house. Sure, I was intentionally heading home to make dinner, but I just didn't have the energy to spend another 20 minutes on my feet.

I evaluated the entire dinner time process and realized that the biggest wastes of time in my kitchen were deciding what to eat, and then finding and collecting all of the ingredients. I thought long and hard about why my default had been unhealthy choices for so long, and I came to the conclusion that convenience trumps healthy foods in my house quite often.

That settled it - I needed convenient, healthy meals in just minutes. I knew that was the only way for me to make sure we ate well, even when we were busy.

My goal was to make the meals so quick and simple that even my kids could pre-prepare dinner. This was more successful than I imagined, and it led me to develop a prep system that requires very little time and effort, allowed me to have simple, yummy meals in minutes, and required very little cleanup. The Perpetually Prepped Kitchen Method is all of those and more. There are quite a few printable pages in this book, and I've inserted them where they are mentioned as well as in one big Appendix at the end of the book.

Let's get started on creating your Perpetually Prepped Kitchen!



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The Perpetually Prepped Method

8 Steps to a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen

Life isn't predictable, and our days are not all smooth and easy. Meal plans are necessary and useful tools, but I don't know anyone who sticks to a meal plan 100% of the time. The key to being perpetually prepped is having a plan B.

My Plan B, and the heart of my Perpetually Prepped Kitchen, is four baskets in my pantry that each hold a complete dinner meal: ingredients, seasoning, and recipe cards. When I'm in a rush for dinner, I pull the basket out and cook. Everything is in

one location, so there is no rushing around to find ingredients, or realizing I've run out of something I need. The recipes I've developed for these pantry baskets can be prepared very quickly, which means you can have a quick, healthy dinner on the table with very little effort.

I also keep complete dinner meals in my freezer, but I freeze each component separately so that they will thaw faster. These meals are very simple but hearty, and perfect for a quick dinner!

Keeping complete meals centrally located and organized ensures that I always have a last-minute meal available and easy to put together.

The most important step for these meals is to put everything you need in one location. If your spouse is unloading the kids from the car, you can run in the house, pull out your pantry basket, and have dinner on the table in just a few minutes. By the time everyone has washed up for dinner, you can be ready to eat!

If you are getting home from work and too tired to cook, you can get a basket out and put dinner together quickly and easily. If you're lucky enough to have someone cook for you, you can direct them to the basket where everything they need is conveniently located. If you have a child old enough to cook safely, this is a great way for them to learn to put together a quick dinner. And it's more or less foolproof, since the directions, ingredients, and seasonings are all ready to go! These pantry baskets have been a perfect solution for nights when I'm sick or leave the kids with a babysitter.

The uses for these baskets and freezer meals are endless, but once you change your habits and eat at home more, they will become invaluable.

To keep my kitchen Perpetually Prepped with last-minute meals and ingredients, I need just a little bit of prep time in the kitchen every week. Creating a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen is easier than you might think. The concept of dinner on the table in minutes is very doable if you utilize your pantry and freezer and prep ahead just a little bit every week.

In the following chapters, I'll outline 8 steps to ensure that your kitchen is always stocked and ready with quick meal components and ingredients.

I've included an infographic that shortens these steps to the 5 main points of the method to give you an overview:

THE
Perpetually Prepped
METHOD

 **PLAN MEALS**
Plan your meals for the week.

 **PANTRY BASKETS**
Create 2-4 complete, shelf-stable meals in baskets in your pantry. Remember to include pre-measured seasoning and instructions.

 **PLAN WHAT TO PREP**
Choose some individual ingredients to prepare ahead and freeze.

 **20-40 MINUTES/WEEK**
Prepare individual ingredients to be frozen and quickly thawed for fast dinners.

 **MAKE NEW HABITS**
Make it a habit to eat at home and build a little bit of preparation into your weekly schedule.



3

Step One: Create Your Plan A

Step One to a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen is critical: make a basic meal plan. It may not be your favorite thing to do, but having a meal plan in place (ANY meal plan in place!) can reduce stress, reduce food waste, and save time and money.

The Perpetually Prepped Method is Plan B, and we will get into the details in the next chapter - I promise! The purpose of the Perpetually Prepped Method is to help you fall back on healthy, quick food choices when your Plan A (your weekly meal plan)

doesn't work out (maybe you're out of the house, too tired, or just don't feel like sticking to your original plan).

The recipes included in this book are comprised of shelf-stable foods. The Perpetually Prepped Method is very helpful if you don't have a meal plan, but you probably won't want to eat from your pantry and freezer every single night. While they taste great, I wouldn't want to eat solely out of my pantry.

Having a Plan A meal plan and a Plan B for when that meal plan just isn't working out will help you keep a great balance and feel organized and prepared for anything.

Your meal plan can be extremely simple. You can use a pre-made meal plan, like those included in my book [365: One Year of Healthy Meals for Busy Families](#), or you can make your own. Your goal in this step is to sketch out a week or a month's worth of meals, and try your best to stick to it. When we create your Plan B in the next chapter, you'll know you have a system to fall back on for those nights that your meal plan just isn't going to work.

Meal Planning Tips:

- Build your meal plan around your schedule. For example, if my son has soccer practice on Wednesdays, I schedule a crockpot meal for Wednesdays.
- Try a weekly meal plan routine. If I always have Italian on Mondays, Tacos on Tuesdays, Soup and Salad on Wednesdays, Meat and Veggies on Thursdays, Casserole on Fridays, Pizza on Saturdays, and leftovers on Sundays, I have a plan! I will always know which general ingredients to keep on hand, and there is freedom and flexibility every night to try a new recipe or enjoy something different.

Along the same lines, try repeating breakfasts and lunches. It takes so much indecision and guess-work out of morning and afternoon meals. 7 breakfasts and 7 lunches rotated throughout the month makes it easier to budget and shop, too!

- Plan around sales, coupons, and what you have on hand. Sometimes referred to as “Reverse Meal Planning” one of my most frugal meal planning tips is to shop first, then plan my meals. When I find a great deal on meat or produce at the grocery store, or on a sales flyer, I can plan my meals around those more frugal items and save money. Shopping my pantry and freezer first is usually a big help with this, too – I always have more food than I think I did!

- Plan a leftover night. This is very helpful in reducing food waste.

- Make your shopping day meal the simplest meal. I learned the hard way that I’m often too tired to cook an elaborate meal the day I go shopping. I know I can always fall back on my Plan B (I’ll help you get started on yours in the next section), but to keep things simple I’ll pick up a rotisserie chicken and heat up some refried beans, or buy a pre-packaged salad. Just about any simple, no-fuss meal will make your day easier and lessen the time you have to spend on your feet in the kitchen. It can be tiring enough just putting groceries away!

- Don’t start from scratch. My goal is to have some of the work for dinner done before I even walk into my kitchen. I aim for having our dinner meals at least 50% done before I get started (if not more). If I have a meal planned and a few key ingredients prepped and ready, I know half of the battle is fought already! We’ll talk through your Perpetually Prepped plan to have some items pre-cooked and ready to go, but it will give you a big head start if you plan your meals around those prepped items.

- Save your meal plans and shopping lists and reuse them! I have years of meal plans that I use and reuse (many are available at workingathomeschool.com).

Small changes like these make me more successful in sticking to my meal plan and make it far less tempting to eat out.

I’ve included four printable templates on the following pages to help you get started with your meal plan! You can scroll through and choose your favorites, but please note that the pages in the Appendix will print in higher quality.

Monthly Menu

Dinners

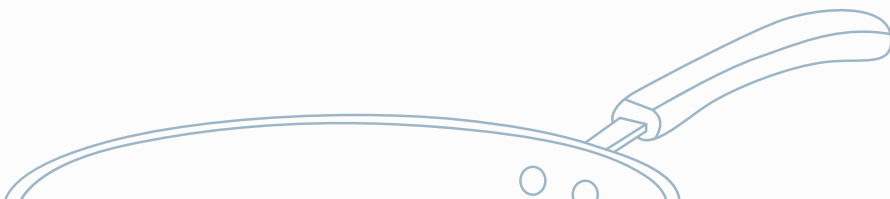
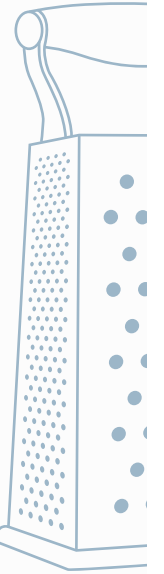
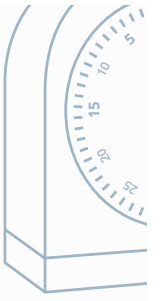
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- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31

Breakfasts

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Lunches

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7



Weekly Meal Plan

monday

B

L

D

tuesday

B

L

D

wednesday

B

L

D

thursday

B

L

D

friday

B

L

D

weekend

B

L

D

WEEKLY
MEAL
PLAN

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

NOTES



My Backup Pantry System: Four Ready-to-Go Meals in Clear Plastic Bins

4

Step Two: Create Your Plan B

This is the heart of the Perpetually Prepped Method: have a backup plan in place!

For a long time, I called the Perpetually Prepped Method “life-proofing” my kitchen. In an ideal world, I would stick to my meal plan every night - but life isn’t always ideal! Illnesses, busy schedules, emergencies, and disasters can sabotage our greatest plans. Even a messy house has been known to derail my good intentions from time to time.

I don't know anyone who sticks to their meal plan 100% of the time. Having pantry baskets ready to go have ensured that my family can still eat a quick, healthy meal without much of a time commitment from me.

Your Plan B is a complete meal in one basket located in your pantry. The ingredients are shelf-stable, which means you won't be wasting food if you don't use your backup meal during the week. It's there when you need it, and comes together in minutes. If you don't have a pantry, the same concept can apply to any cabinet, as long as you can fit a few baskets or small bins inside.

To keep a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen, I recommend having two backup meals ready at all times. I usually have about four or five. Not only does this help when things are leaner financially, but it gives us options when I'm too busy to cook. In addition, you'll want to have as many pre-cooked, frozen single ingredients ready (especially proteins, like shredded frozen chicken and ground beef).

One of my favorite pantry meals is canned chicken, black beans, instant brown rice, one can of corn, one jar of salsa, and a packet of taco seasoning. These ingredients, with a recipe card and instructions, are kept in my pantry basket and ready to go for a five-minute meal. Healthier, easier, and cheaper than takeout! Keeping pre-measured seasoning in the basket (or a packet of seasoning) is a big help when it comes to quick dinner meals.

In Step Two, you'll choose the meals you want to prepare to put your Plan B in place. You don't need to start cooking yet, you can just decide which meals sound the best!

This is also the time to get your pantry baskets ready. Since you're just getting started, I would recommend re-purposing a basket from elsewhere in your home. To see the baskets I use in my pantry, you can visit workingathomeschool.com/ppkresources.

The following printable pages are designed to help you plan your pantry meals. For ideas, you can use the recipe cards included at the end of the book, or choose some from the No-Recipe Pantry Meals worksheet or Mix-and-Match Pantry Meals worksheets.



Clear Pantry Bins





Wire Pantry Bins



No-Recipe pantry meals

Spaghetti + Marinara Sauce

Light Progresso Soup (or other favorite canned soup)

Rice + Beans

Tuna Salad: Tuna + Mayonnaise + Dill Relish

Burrito Bowls: Canned Chicken + Rice + Beans + Salsa

Chicken Soup: Chicken broth + Rice + Canned Mixed Veggies + Favorite Seasoning

Mix and Match pantry meals

Choose 1 for your base:

chicken breast

tuna

microwave
brown rice

pasta



Choose 1 Mix-In:

pesto

Marinara Sauce

pineapple tidbits (drained) +
soy sauce

mixed vegetables (drained)

beans + corn + Rotel



Choose Your Seasoning to Taste:

These seasoning ideas should be used to taste or to suit your family's preferences. No seasoning is needed for pesto or marinara.

Asian: salt & pepper to taste, toasted sesame oil

Italian: Italian seasoning

Mexican: cumin, chili powder, salt, & pepper

Homestyle: thyme, parsley, salt & pepper

Add a squeeze of lemon or lime juice as desired to boost flavor.

Prep Ahead action plan

Date:

Pantry Baskets:

Shop By:

Complete By:

Freezer Items:



5

Step Three: Plan Your Prep Time

The Perpetually Prepped Method is more than just baskets! Sure, you can use the basket idea alone to have quick and easy meals ready to go. But to really be Perpetually Prepped, you need an action plan! You need a full backup plan to keep your pantry, freezer, and mindset ready for last-minute meals. Although there are several components, the actual “system” of making sure your kitchen is Perpetually Prepped is easy to follow. In this section, I’ll walk you through the blueprint of being Perpetually Prepped.

One of the keys to a Perpetually Prepped Kitchen is making a new habit of preparing food once a week. For me, it's every Thursday at around 4pm. It used to be every Saturday, and it can be any day of the week that you have time and can build around a routine.

In this step, you'll want to choose a day and time every week for a little kitchen preparation. I utilize time blocking in my day to maximize my time and efforts. 25 min-ute time blocks really work the best for me and help me to be the most productive. I schedule cleaning, school work, and projects in these 25 minute increments (I even set a timer). I recommend setting a 25 minute time block to get some items cooked and frozen or refrigerated. If you are able to schedule two 25 minute time blocks every month or so, your prep work will be that much easier for the rest of the month.

If your kitchen is fully prepped and you don't need to replace anything (maybe you've had a stellar week with sticking to your meal plan and didn't need a Plan B), go ahead and use this time to prepare a snack or dessert. We'll get into the details of what to prep in Step Four. Please don't feel overwhelmed by the idea of creating this new habit. If you truly can't find an extra 25 minutes to spend in the kitchen every week, try adding just a little bit of prep time on to your dinner preparations.

When I can't find a solid block of time to designate to preparing food, I often double the meal I'm cooking for dinner that night and freeze the second portion. I don't count fully frozen meals as Perpetually Prepped meals because the thawing time disqualifies them for use as last-minute meals. Even so, it is a great feeling to have a complete dinner in the freezer, and it does help for those times when you know you'll be busy.

You can always double a single ingredient, as well. Browning an extra pound of ground beef is a great way to stock a single component in your freezer for busy nights (please read Chapter 7 for my tips on freezing meat). Chopping an extra onion when you already have your cutting board and knife out is a great way to cut down on dishes (and tears – I hate cutting onions and love to get it all out of the way at once!).

It takes just a few minutes to get some eggs boiling for snacks before you start preparing dinner, or chop some extra veggies for salads for the week while you have something simmering on the stove. Find a night that's not too busy during the week and dedicate just a few minutes to preparing ahead.

A Perpetually Prepped Kitchen has multiple meal options available at all times. Having several tasty options ready to go can make the difference between eating at home and choosing healthy foods or eating out – which can cost you in more ways than one! I have a handy Weekly Action Plan Checklist ready for you to complete in Step 5 that will detail exactly what you can prepare to make the most of your time.

Step three is all about choosing when you will prepare, and sticking to it! Use the Goals Worksheet to write down your chosen time and date for getting a few things done in the kitchen. This prep time is a sanity saver! My beginning goals were to spend 25 minutes in the kitchen every Saturday, to keep two pantry baskets prepped with easy meals, and to keep at least a few snacks ready at all times. Set your Perpetually Prepped Kitchen Goals, and follow the rest of the steps to stick with them!

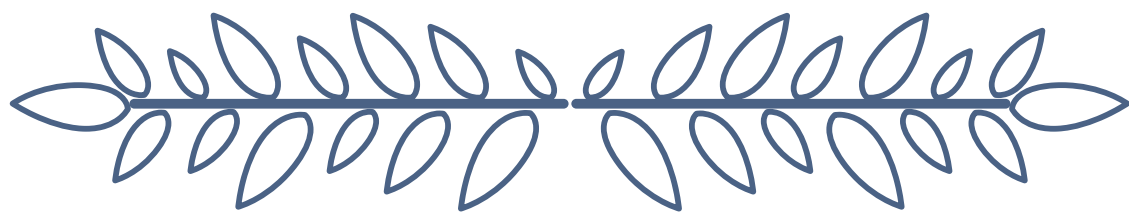
Goals

GOAL:

ACTION
STEPS:

WHY:

START DATE:



GOAL:

ACTION
STEPS:

WHY:

START DATE:



6

Step Four: Plan and Shop

Now that you've designated a time to prepare food, you'll need to pull your choices together and go shopping!

In this step, you'll first complete your Freezer and Pantry Inventory Sheets (located at the end of this step and in the Appendix). I know it sounds painful, but it's so worth it! When I first completed a pantry inventory sheet, I was able to cross \$22 off of my grocery list. Yes, I was actually about to go out and buy duplicates of eighteen ingredi-

ents! Keeping a freezer and pantry inventory sheet can definitely save time and money.

Next, you'll gather the recipes for the pantry meals you chose in step 2 and add the necessary ingredients to your shopping list. You'll also want to choose some individual components to make ahead for the freezer.

Along with a printable grocery list, I've included "Keep It Stocked" worksheets for both the pantry and freezer. These are just my suggestions for food items to keep on hand - feel free to create your own lists to prepare your favorite foods! After your grocery list is completed, it's time to shop and get ready to prep just a little at a time.

Freezer inventory

Inventory Date:

Item/Meal:

Quantity:

Exp. Date:

Pantry inventory

Inventory Date:

Item/Meal:

Quantity:

Exp. Date:

Keep it stocked

[in the freezer]

Meat:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

shredded chicken breast

cooked ground beef

Grains/ Legumes:

cooked quinoa

cooked brown rice

cooked beans

Other:

Keep it stocked

[in the pantry]

Item:

Quantity:

Use by:

canned chicken

canned tuna

brown rice

microwave brown rice

dried beans

quinoa

canned black beans

canned pinto beans

canned kidney beans

canned garbanzo beans

Rotel (mild or medium)

diced tomatoes

pineapple tidbits



7

Step Five: Prepare for Anything

You've got the groceries, you've either purchased or repurposed baskets, and you're ready to get started. It's time to put your first few baskets together and get started with your prep time!

Preparing the baskets is pretty self-explanatory and easy to do, so if you haven't already, now is the time! Put those baskets in the pantry with everything you need for a quick meal and be ready to rely on them when you need them.



Let's take a moment to talk about preparing freezer foods. On the surface, it would seem that freezer foods just wouldn't work as a Plan B, or for meals in minutes, because they would take too long to thaw.

It is ideal to thaw prep-ahead freezer foods ahead of the time that you'll need them, but because the Perpetually Prepped method is your plan B you don't always know when you'll need them!

If prepared correctly, you can thaw frozen foods more quickly and easily and still utilize them for your Plan B dinner. They may not be ready in 5 minutes, but you can still use them for a quick dinner! I've put together a quick-thaw guide at the end of this section to help you thaw your dinner items quickly - in 10-20 minutes, in most cases!

One of the "secrets" I've found to quickly thawing frozen foods is to arrange the food in a single layer in a ziploc bag and lay flat to freeze. This works for ground beef, shredded chicken, quinoa, rice, and so much more! A full freezer meal can take hours to thaw, but separately frozen components that you'll use in various recipes can be thawed quickly and easily.

On my cooking day (remember, it's just 25 or 50 minutes each time, not a full day!), I'll prepare several items at once, often utilizing my Instant Pot.

My planned prep days usually include at least one of the following:

- Instant Pot frozen chicken (for freezer)
- Instant Pot brown rice (for freezer)
- Hardboiled eggs for snacks (for refrigerator)
- Energy balls for the kids or a low-carb dessert for me
- One restocked pantry basket (if needed)

That's just a quick snapshot of what I do every week – now it's time to create your own system! In this section, you'll find a lined "Pantry Basket Inventory" sheet, a "Pantry Basket Meals" Inventory sheet with baskets to fill in (this is what I use), Quick Freezer Meal Ideas Mix-and-Match worksheet, Prep Ahead Worksheets, and a Prep Ahead Weekly Action Plan Checklist.

Your Prep Plan for Each Week:

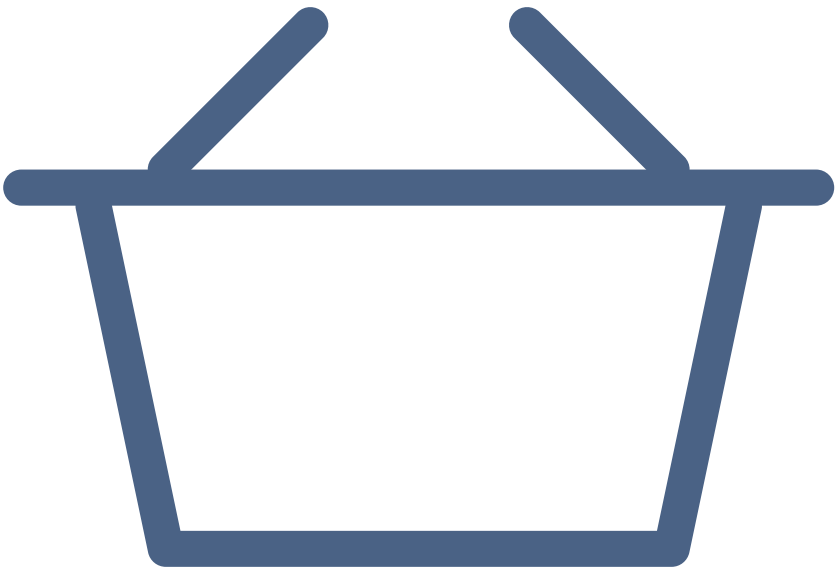
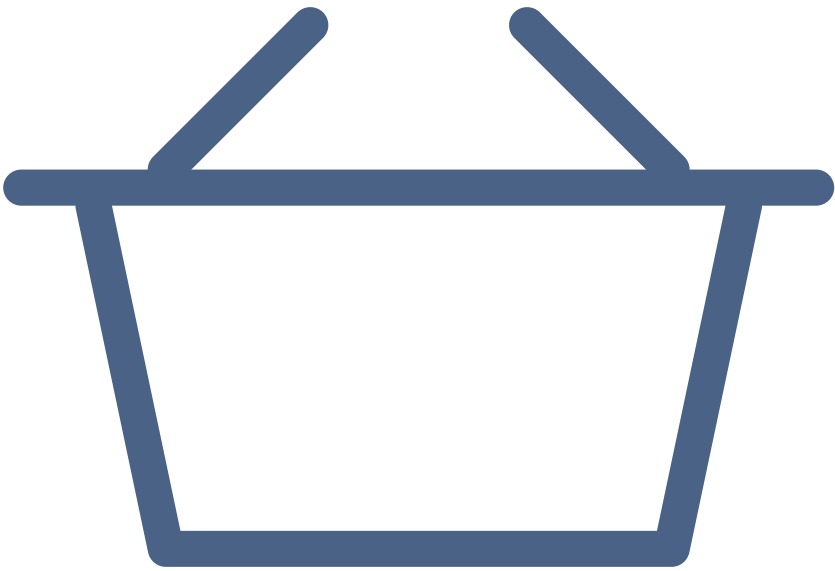
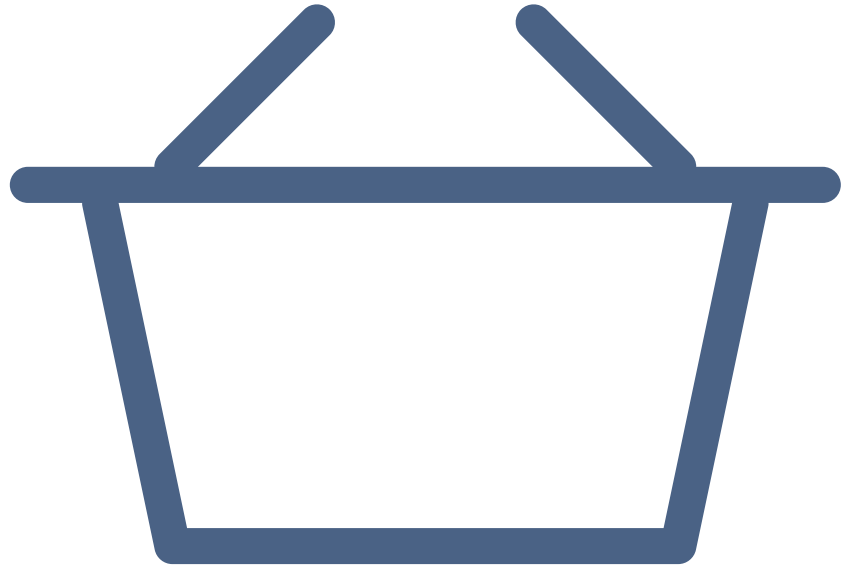
1. Check your refrigerator for food items that need to be used. Pay special attention to meals from your meal plan that you didn't get to so you can repurpose those fresh ingredients.
2. Check your freezer and pantry inventory sheets to make sure they are up to date.
3. Look over your meal plan for the week and identify items that can be prepped ahead. Use this time to prep one or two ingredients.
4. Choose a pantry meal to assemble.
5. Choose a freezer item from the "Keep it Stocked" Printable (see Appendix).
6. Choose snacks and desserts from the worksheet you made in step four.

What if you don't have time for prep? Sometimes I am just too busy to follow my weekly action plan to stay perpetually prepped, and that's OK!

While I was developing a new habit of weekly prep time and eating at home I didn't ever want to skip the plan, because I needed the weekly routine to help me create the new habit. But now that the habit is flourishing, it's OK to miss it every once in a while. This month I only had two days to spend a few minutes prepping ahead, and I am OK with that. As long as I keep at least a few pantry baskets ready to go, the

rest is helpful but not totally necessary. I will need to have a longer prep session to make up for lost time as soon as I can, but again, that's life! These prep sessions ultimately save so much time that I'm very willing to prioritize carving out a few minutes every week whenever possible.

Pantry Basket meals



Pantry inventory

Inventory Date:

Item/Meal:

Quantity:

Exp. Date:

Quick freezer meal ideas

Separate, quick-thaw freezer components from the "thaw" section make it incredibly easy to put together a last-minute meal!

Choose One:

Choose One Style:

Thaw:

Add:

Season with:

ground beef

shredded chicken
breasts

quinoa

brown rice

diced ham

shredded pork

cooked beans

diced chicken

Mexican:

frozen bell peppers
frozen onions
1 can mild Rotel

Italian:

1 jar marinara
1 can quartered
artichoke hearts

Homestyle:

1 cup broth
2 cups frozen
veggies

Mexican:

2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp chili powder
salt & pepper to
taste

Italian:

1 tsp oregano
or
1 T Italian
seasoning

Homestyle:

1 tsp thyme
1 tsp parsley
salt & pepper to
taste

Choose one to boost flavor:

- squeeze of lemon or lime juice
- grated parmesan
- 2 T tomato paste
- season to taste

Prepahead

Meat:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

Grains/ Legumes:

Other:

Prep ahead



Snacks:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

Desserts:

Prep Ahead weekly action plan checklist

- Check your refrigerator for foods that need to be used up. Prepare these foods so they are not wasted.
- Check your freezer and pantry inventory sheets to make sure they are up to date.
- Look over your meal plan for the week and identify items that can be prepped ahead and prepare them.
- Choose a pantry meal to assemble (if needed).
- Choose a freezer item and prepare it (if needed).
- Choose snacks and desserts and prep one or two for the week.
- Update your freezer and pantry inventory sheets as needed.

Quick-Thaw guidelines

Freezing Cooked Meat:

- Once meat is cooled completely: shred, crumble, or dice.
- Place in a labeled gallon-sized freezer bag.
- Spread the meat inside the bag so that it is arranged in a single, flat layer.
- Push excess air out.
- Seal tightly and freeze.

Thawing Methods:

Stovetop:

- Bring a big pot of water to 140 degrees (just a few bubbles).
- Keeping the frozen meat inside a sealed freezer bag, insert the bag in the hot water. It should thaw in less than 12 minutes, so start (carefully!) checking after 6 minutes or so.*

Sink:

- Place the sealed bag of meat in a colander and thaw under cold running water.

Microwave:

- Use the defrost option on your microwave.

Refrigerator:

- If you have the time, this is the safest method. Thaw the meat in a sealed bag in your meat drawer.

Thawing Tray:

- Thaw according to thawing tray directions. This method is pretty quick! You can see my favorite tray at workingathomeschool.com/ppkresources.


*This method is described as an FDA-approved method, but please research its safety for yourself! I am not a food expert and accept no liability for improperly thawed meat. These are suggestions, so please take them as such and always research your methods for maximum food safety.

Step Six: Expand Your Pantry Baskets

Once you have a stocked pantry and freezer, it's very helpful to start thinking of breakfasts and lunches you can prep ahead, too! Some of my favorite prep-ahead pantry baskets for breakfast include oatmeal with dried mix-in ingredients, individual baggies of cereal for the kids, and protein bars.

For lunch, a simple kid-ready pantry basket could include a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly, a loaf of bread, and a snack. Think fruit cups, granola bars, or other kids' favorites. Having a "lunch station basket" in your pantry can save a lot of time and make it easy for kids to stretch their skills and make lunch for themselves. On the next few pages you'll find some ideas from me, and blank worksheets to fill in your own.

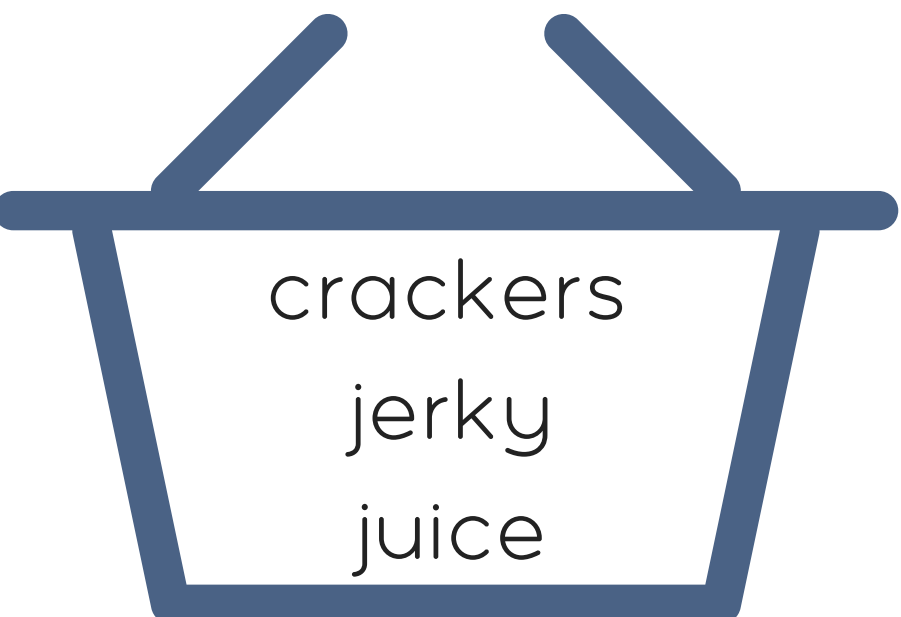
Pantry Basket kid-friendly lunches
& snacks




peanut butter
jelly
bread



chips
applesauce
GoPicnics

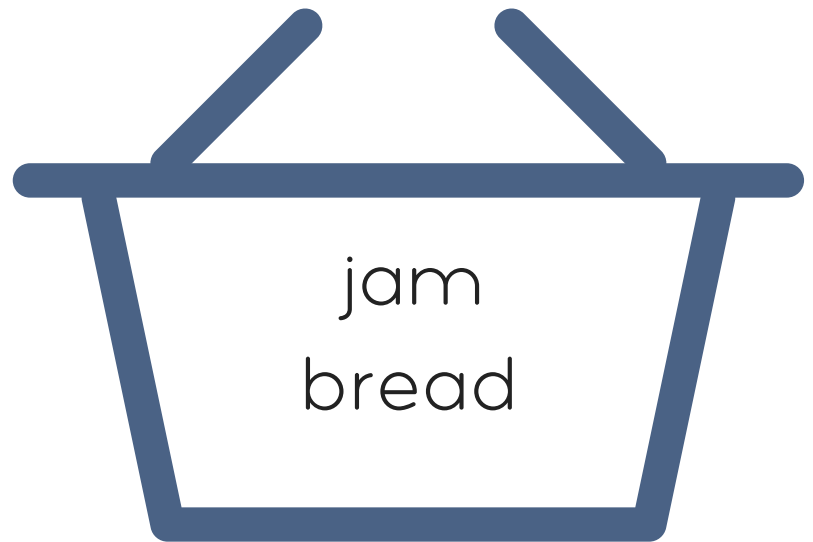
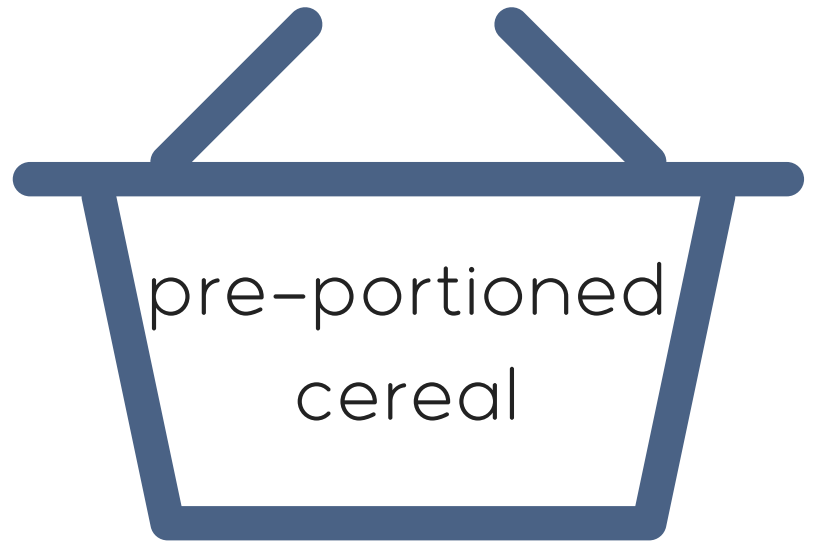
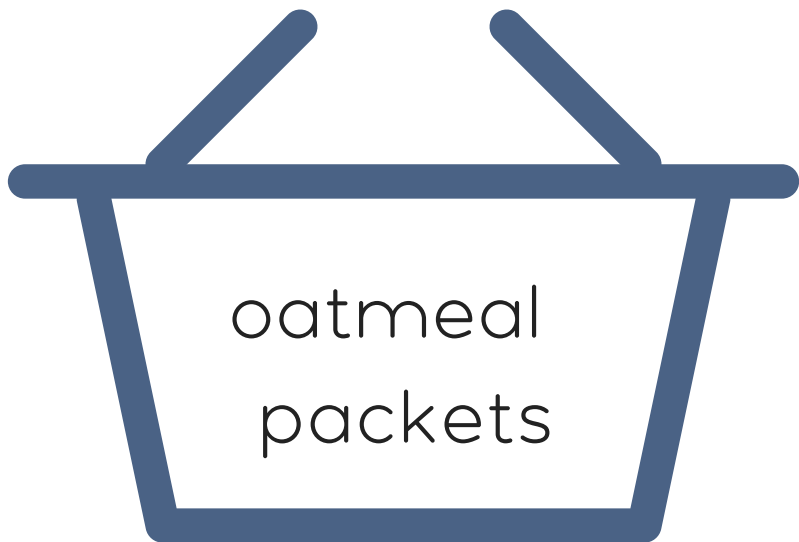


crackers
jerky
juice

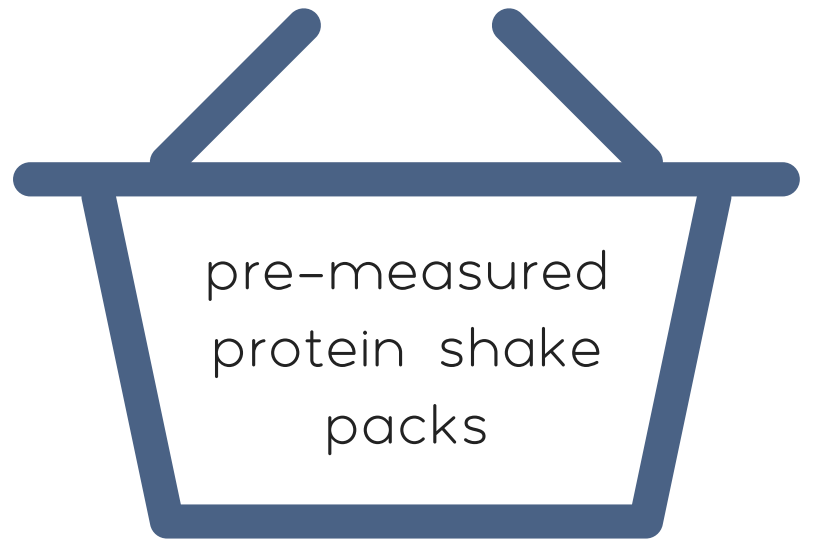
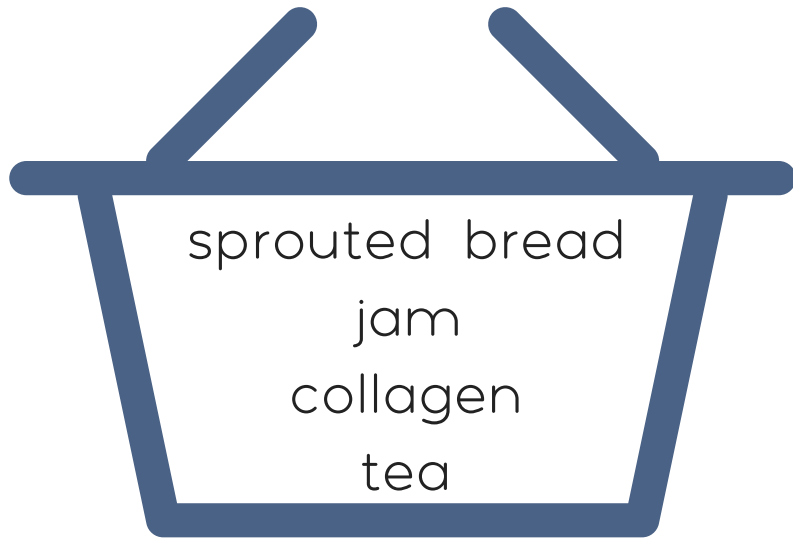


fruit cups
granola bars
nuts

Pantry Basket kid-friendly breakfasts



Pantry Basket breakfasts





9

Step Seven: Build New Habits

This is a big one. When I decided to eat at home more, I needed a new habit. Ditching old habits and forming new ones takes a little work, but I've outlined the process for you to make it a little easier!

In the book "The Power of Habit" by Charles Duhigg, the author discusses the anatomy of a habit. I highly recommend this book - in a roundabout way, it helped me understand my eating habits.

Based on my own understanding of how habits work, I think it's critical that we identify why we make food choices - both good and bad, convenient or inconvenient.

The first part of the habit is the “cue.” When you are engaged in a habit (like driving through for fast food after soccer practice), it usually starts with a cue. The cue can be a certain time of day, a certain place, a certain person, an emotion, and so on. This can also be considered a trigger. When I quit drinking soda, I identified fast food as my soda trigger. I would “need” to have a soda every single time I ate at a fast food restaurant. For a short time, I avoided eating out entirely to avoid my trigger. But after a while, it wasn't practical to skip birthday parties and other things at restaurants just so I wouldn't be “cued” to have a soda! Even so, temporarily avoiding the places that tempted me the most got me past the initial cue.

To avoid a trigger for a habit like eating out after an event, you might throw a wrench in the system by packing a snack to take with you to disrupt your hunger. You could also try driving home a different way to avoid passing by your normal restaurant. Another idea would be to eat before you go. It's very important to avoid your trigger and stop your bad habit in its tracks. Maybe your problem isn't eating out, maybe it's eating poorly at home when you're in a rush. I have been there! The first and simplest solution is to only keep healthy foods in your home. If you have kids, or your spouse does some of the shopping, this could be more of a challenge. If you struggle in this area, just having your Perpetually Prepped backup plan set up could make a huge difference for you. In my case, it was just a matter of identifying that I defaulted to boxed macaroni and cheese when I felt tired, and derailing my “tired” trigger by telling the family what we'd have for dinner. They would have noticed if I pulled out the boxed macaroni and cheese when I had mentioned a Rustic White Beans dish for dinner! The extra accountability helped me avoid my trigger until the habit was broken.

The second part of a habit, what makes it so satisfying, is the reward. Now, this may not be the food itself, continuing with our example of eating out. It could be the satisfaction of not having to cook. Or the feeling you get when you get home and everyone's well-fed. The important thing for the second part of busting your habit is to try to substitute another reward. Can you feel just as satisfied using the money you were going to pay for your dinner out to pay for something else? Could it feel just as good to have a meal already prepped in the crockpot so you come home to a completed task? Identify the satisfying part of your bad habit, and swap it out for something different or healthier for faster results.

To form a new habit, it's all about routine! Switch things up to align with your goals. After avoiding restaurants when I stopped drinking soda, I began developing a new habit of getting a cup of water right when I got to the restaurant or fast food place. This new habit was a healthy one, and it prevented me from giving in to temptation – and from overeating! Make an effort to start a new routine with built in good habits. You'll be so glad you did!

Step Eight: Put it all together

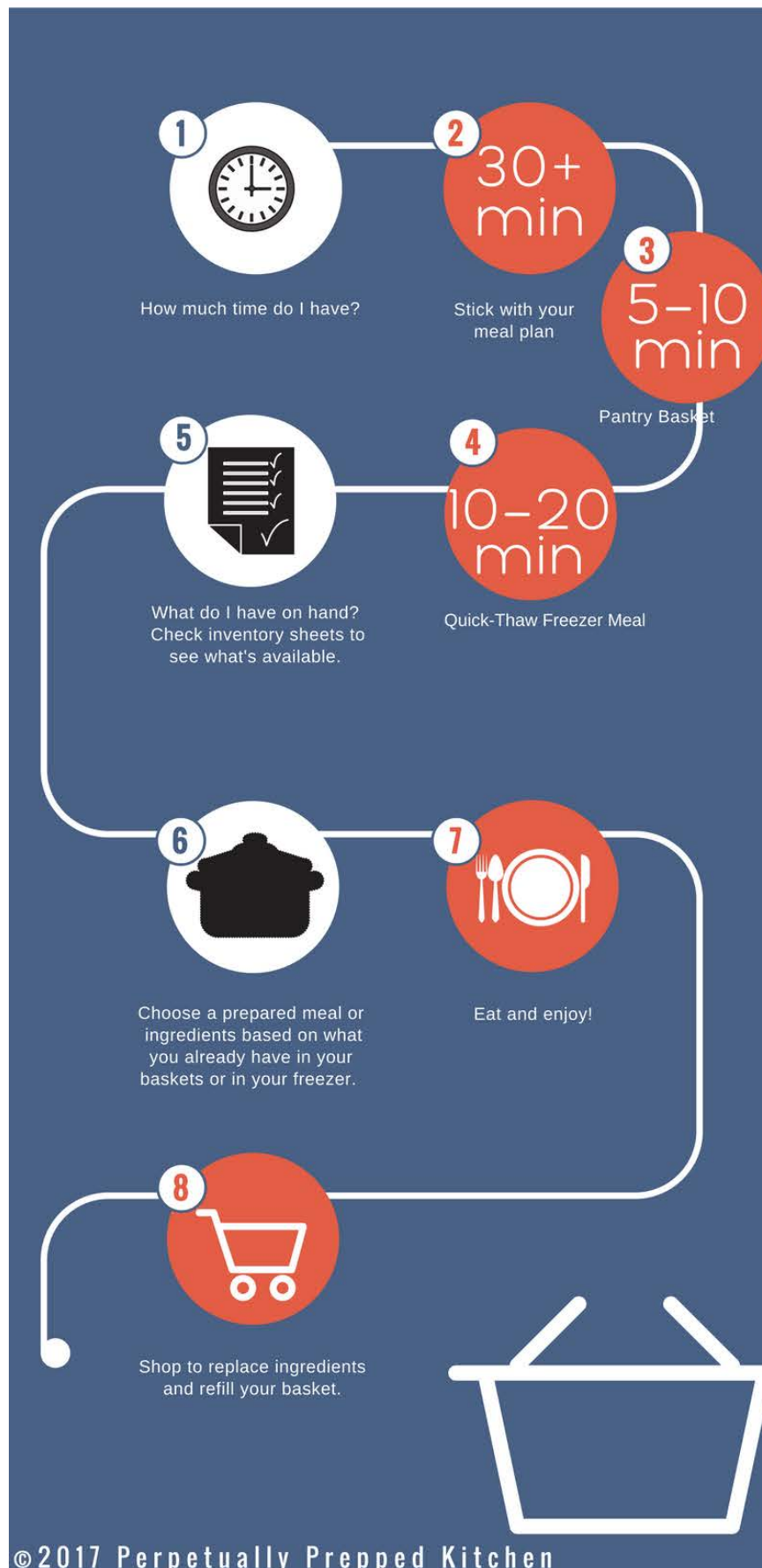
If you have even one pantry basket ready to use (no matter if you used one of the recipes included in the Recipe section of this book, or if you came up with your own), you have a backup plan. And with your Plan B in place, you are ready to eat well at home - even when you're too busy, too tired, or just don't feel like cooking!

Once you've gotten started, keep going! Building a weekly routine that includes just a few prep items has kept my kitchen stocked and prepped for busy nights, nights when I'm tired, times when we are out of money in our grocery budget, and so much more. Just a little bit of prep goes a long way, so if you only have twenty minutes to spend in the kitchen please use them! Even preparing boiled eggs for a snack for the week, or creating one pantry basket is well worth your time.

You'll also want to replace your pantry baskets as you use them. I always aim to have at least three complete meals in my pantry at a time, but I like to have four or five. Once we use up the ingredients in a pantry basket, I copy the ingredients from the recipe card onto my shopping list right away so I can replace them. Keeping the baskets stocked is key to keeping your backup plan in place!

Please try to stick with your new system of preparing simple foods and baskets for at least 60 days. It may take several weeks to make weekly prep and refilling your baskets a habit, but it's worth the small effort once a week to ensure success and mini-mal effort on busy weeknights.

using your PLAN B



Part II

The Recipes



Southwest Skillet Chicken

All recipes feed 4-6, but can be easily doubled to feed more or halved to feed fewer.

A note about the recipes in this section:

These recipes are simple, quick, and designed to be adapted to your tastes. Please use these as guidelines! Feel free to put together your own Pantry Basket Recipes using the Mix and Match Pantry Meals Worksheet, No-Recipe Pantry Meals Worksheet, or your own family favorites.

Some of these recipes use canned chicken. If you've never tried it before, it is a very versatile kitchen staple. I was really happy to find BPA-free cans of organic canned chicken at Kroger, but any canned chicken will work.

There are 14 Pantry Basket Recipes here; I've found that since I only keep four Pantry Basket Meals in my pantry at a time, and I go through about two - four per month, these fourteen recipes (along with the Mix and Match Pantry Meals Worksheet and No-Recipe Pantry Meals Worksheet) have provided more than enough meal ideas to get us through a year!

Pick the recipes that appeal to you the most; or search Pinterest for other options. These backup meals have been a lifesaver for me and I hope they will be for you, as well!

To save the most time, pantry baskets should be packed with all ingredients (including a bag with pre-measured seasoning!), and a recipe card or index card with directions.



Rustic White Beans

Rustic White Beans

Ingredients:

- olive oil
- 1 jar oil-packed sundried tomatoes (drained, rinsed, patted dry)
- 2 cans Cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (14.5 oz) quartered artichoke hearts, drained and rinsed
- 2 cans (14.5 oz) fire-roasted tomatoes
- 2 T minced onion
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/2 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp oregano
- 1 tiny pinch stevia or sugar-free sweetener (optional)

Directions:

- Heat 1 teaspoon olive oil in a skillet.
- Saute sun-dried tomatoes with minced onion and garlic powder for about 2 minutes.
- Add fire-roasted tomatoes, beans, artichoke hearts, and seasoning to the pan.
- Cover the pan, lower heat to medium, and cook 8 minutes.
- Serve



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Southwest Skillet Chicken

Ingredients:

- 2 cans chicken, drained and rinsed
- 1 can mild Rotel
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can Mexican corn, rinsed and drained
- 1 Tablespoon cumin
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp pepper

Directions:

- Heat a skillet over medium heat
- Combine all canned ingredients in skillet
- Season
- Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and simmer 5-7 minutes

Notes: Serve with chips if desired. This is a bit spicy, so my kids like to top theirs with sour cream and cheese.

**Please note that adding sour cream or cheese would change the meal type.
If you add chips, please make sure they are baked and low-fat!**



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6 Can Soup

Ingredients:

1 can Mexican corn
1 can kidney beans
1 can pinto beans
1 can black beans
1 can diced tomatoes
1 can mild or medium Rotel
2 cans of chicken
salt & pepper
1 T cumin
1 tsp chili powder
salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Heat a pot over medium heat
- Add cans and seasoning
- Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to medium and simmer 7-10 minutes.



Hawaiian Chicken

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 2 cans chicken, drained
- 1 can pineapple chunks, drained
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- salt and pepper to taste
- Two 16 oz packages microwave brown rice
- pinch of stevia or other sugar substitute
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- pinch of crushed red pepper
- salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Heat a skillet over low heat
- Add sesame oil
- Microwave the rice
- Add rice and chicken to a skillet
- Season rice and chicken with salt, pepper, onion, powder, and garlic powder
- Add soy sauce and a pinch of stevia
- Stir in pineapple and heat through
- Serve with hot sauce, if desired



Black Beans

Ingredients:

2 cans black beans
1/4 tsp chipotle chili powder
1 tsp oregano or cumin
salt to taste (I use about 1/2 tsp)

Directions:

- Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil
- Mash about half of the beans (you can use a fork or a potato masher)
- Serve



Stuffed Sweet Potatoes

Ingredients:

1 sweet potato per person

Topping Ingredients:

1 tsp taco seasoning
1 small can mild diced green chiles
1 tsp chili powder
1/2 tsp smoked paprika
1/2 tsp cumin
salt and pepper to taste
1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 jar of salsa

Directions:

- Microwave potatoes until soft and cooked through (8-10 min for 4 potatoes)
- Combine topping ingredients in a small saucepan and heat until cooked through (about 5-7 minutes)
- Top sweet potatoes with topping.
- Top with salsa and 0% Greek yogurt if desired.



Tuna Salad

Ingredients:

- 2 10 oz cans white meat tuna in white, drained
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 2 Tablespoon stone ground mustard
- salt and pepper to taste (fresh ground pepper is best)
- squeeze of fresh lemon (optional)
- 1 teaspoon fresh Italian parsley (optional)
- 2 Tablespoons pickle relish

Directions:

- Break up tuna with a fork.
- Combine all ingredients.



Black Bean Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 4 tsp ground cumin
- 1/4 tsp red pepper flakes
- 4 cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 4 cups vegetable broth (low-sodium is best)
- 2 Tablespoons fresh lime juice
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup salsa
- Optional Garnish: fresh chopped cilantro, baked low-fat tortilla chips

Directions:

- Put garlic powder, cumin, and red pepper flakes in a sauce pan and heat over medium heat about 30 seconds, or until fragrant.
- Add beans and broth, bring to a boil, then turn heat down and simmer 5-7 minutes.
- VERY CAREFULLY puree about 4 cups of the soup in a blender until smooth (blenders can explode, please make sure your blender can handle hot liquids, and let steam escape from the top, but the steam is SUPER hot so please be careful).
- Return the pureed soup to the pot, stir in lime juice, season with salt and pepper to taste.



Antipasto Salad

Ingredients:

1 jar mild banana wax peppers
1 jar yellow pepperoncini
1 jar marinated artichoke hearts, quartered
pickled cremini mushrooms
1 jar black or green olives
8-12 oz. genoa salami (or other salami that doesn't need to be refrigerated)
8 oz Italian dressing
Optional: Add 8 oz mini mozzarella balls (Bocconcini)
plus 8 oz grape tomatoes

Directions:

- Dice salami (you can chop or dice all ingredients if you prefer smaller bites)
- Add 1/4 cup each of DRAINED peppers, mushrooms
- Add 1/2 cup olives
- Add entire DRAINED jar of artichokes
- Toss with Italian dressing.



Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp mild curry powder
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- pinch cayenne pepper (optional)
- pinch of nutmeg
- 1 tsp salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1 can coconut milk
- one 29 oz can pumpkin puree (pure pumpkin, not pie filling)
- roasted, unsalted pepitas or pumpkin seeds for garnish (optional)

Directions:

- Combine all ingredients, bring to a boil, then QUICKLY reduce heat to a simmer
- Simmer 5 minutes.
- VERY CAREFULLY puree the soup in a blender in batches until smooth (blenders can explode, please make sure your blender can handle hot liquids, and let steam escape from the top, but the steam is SUPER hot so please be careful).
- Serve with pepitas as garnish (optional)



Tomato Soup

Ingredients:

1/3 cup sun-dried tomatoes
28 oz can crushed tomatoes
1 cup coconut milk (full fat)
2 peeled cloves of garlic
1 T dried basil
1 tsp Italian seasoning
1 tsp onion powder
pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
pinch of stevia
1 clove minced garlic
1/4 cup water
salt (just a small pinch!) and fresh ground pepper to taste

Directions:

- Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth.
- Pour into a pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, then simmer 5-10 minutes

Special Notes:

Season to taste - tomato soup can always seem bland if not seasoned well. Add small amounts of seasoning and add more if desired. My kids love this with a sprinkle of parmesan!



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Quick Tortilla Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 can of corn, drained
- 2 quarts of chicken broth
- 1 can of black beans, drained
- 1 10 oz can of chicken, drained
- 1 can mild rotel
- 2 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Add all ingredients to a pot and bring to a boil
Immediately reduce heat and simmer 5-7 minutes
Serve

Special Notes:

Don't forget the salt and pepper, but start with small amounts and add more as desired. This is a bit spicy, but great with cheese and sour cream, or crushed tortilla chips on top.



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Simple Hummus

Ingredients:

2 15 oz cans chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed
2 large garlic cloves
2 Tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1/2 tsp cumin
good pinch of paprika
1/4 cup of water
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 Tablespoon olive oil
Optional Garnish: Chile Flakes

Directions:

- Add chickpeas, garlic, lemon juice, cumin, and paprika to a food processor and blend until smooth.
- Add more water if needed to get desired consistency.
- Season with salt and pepper, stir, and top with olive oil and chili flakes if desired.



Chicken Tacos

Ingredients:

3 10 oz cans chicken breast, drained
3 14.5 oz cans diced tomatoes
1 Tablespoon cumin
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoons pepper

Optional Garnish: Cheese, Sour Cream, Mashed Avocado

Directions:

- Put chicken in a pan and break it up into smaller pieces.
- Add tomatoes and seasoning
- Stir until flavors are combined



Ground Beef

Instant Pot Directions



Ingredients:

2 lbs. raw ground beef

Directions if raw beef is frozen:

- Place trivet into the steel bowl in the Instant Pot.
- Put frozen ground beef on top of trivet. Add 1 cup of water.
- Following the manufacturer's directions, cook for 25 minutes.
- Once it's safe to open the Instant Pot, check the temperature of the beef. Make sure it is at 160 degrees.

Directions if raw beef is thawed:

- Cook ground beef with the "Sauté" Option on the Instant Pot.

Cool beef completely. Arrange in a single layer in a ziploc freezer bag, or multiple ziploc freezer bags if needed. Seal tightly and lay flat to freeze.



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Quinoa

Instant Pot Directions



Ingredients:

1 cup quinoa
1 1/2 cups chicken broth
pinch of salt

Directions:

- Rinse quinoa thoroughly.
- Put quinoa, broth, and salt in steel bowl in the Instant Pot.
- Following the manufacturer's directions, cook for 1 minute.
- Let pressure release naturally.
- Fluff with a fork and serve.

Cool quinoa completely. Arrange in a single layer in a ziploc freezer bag, or multiple ziploc freezer bags if needed. Seal tightly and lay flat to freeze.



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Rice

Instant Pot Directions



Ingredients:

2 cups brown rice
2 cups chicken broth or water
pinch of salt

Directions:

- Put rice, broth or water, and salt in the steel bowl in the Instant Pot.
- Set the Instant Pot on Manual and cook for 22 minutes according to manufacturer's directions.

Cool rice completely. Arrange in a single layer in a ziploc freezer bag, or multiple ziploc freezer bags if needed. Seal tightly and lay flat to freeze.



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Shredded Chicken

Instant Pot Directions



Ingredients:

2 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breasts (fresh or frozen)
1/2 cup water or chicken broth
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper

Directions if chicken is frozen:

- Place all ingredients in steel pot in the Instant Pot.
- Cook according to manufacturer's directions for 12 minutes if chicken is frozen; 8 minutes if chicken is fresh.
- Cool completely and shred with two forks.

Cool chicken completely. Arrange in a single layer in a ziploc freezer bag, or multiple ziploc freezer bags if needed. Seal tightly and lay flat to freeze.



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Part III

Appendix

Monthly Menu

Dinners

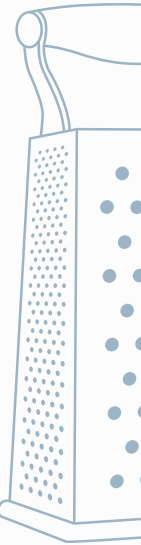
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Breakfasts

- 1
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Lunches

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- 7



Weekly Meal Plan

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WEEKLY
MEAL
PLAN

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

NOTES

No-Recipe pantry meals

Spaghetti + Marinara Sauce

Light Progresso Soup (or other favorite canned soup)

Rice + Beans

Tuna Salad: Tuna + Mayonnaise + Dill Relish

Burrito Bowls: Canned Chicken + Rice + Beans + Salsa

Chicken Soup: Chicken broth + Rice + Canned Mixed Veggies + Favorite Seasoning

Mix and Match pantry meals

Choose 1 for your base:

chicken breast

tuna

microwave
brown rice

pasta



Choose 1 Mix-In:

pesto

Marinara Sauce

pineapple tidbits (drained) +
soy sauce

mixed vegetables (drained)

beans + corn + Rotel



Choose Your Seasoning to Taste:

These seasoning ideas should be used to taste or to suit your family's preferences. No seasoning is needed for pesto or marinara.

Asian: salt & pepper to taste, toasted sesame oil

Italian: Italian seasoning

Mexican: cumin, chili powder, salt, & pepper

Homestyle: thyme, parsley, salt & pepper

Add a squeeze of lemon or lime juice as desired to boost flavor.

Keep it stocked

[in the freezer]

Meat:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

shredded chicken breast

cooked ground beef

Grains/ Legumes:

cooked quinoa

cooked brown rice

cooked beans

Other:

Keep it stocked

[in the pantry]

Item:

Quantity:

Use by:

canned chicken

canned tuna

brown rice

microwave brown rice

dried beans

quinoa

canned black beans

canned pinto beans

canned kidney beans

canned garbanzo beans

Rotel (mild or medium)

diced tomatoes

pineapple tidbits

Quick freezer meal ideas

Separate, quick-thaw freezer components from the "thaw" section make it incredibly easy to put together a last-minute meal!

Choose One:

Thaw:

ground beef

shredded chicken
breasts

quinoa

brown rice

diced ham

shredded pork

cooked beans

diced chicken

Choose One Style:

Add:

Mexican:
frozen bell peppers
frozen onions
1 can mild Rotel

Italian:
1 jar marinara
1 can quartered
artichoke hearts

Homestyle:
1 cup broth
2 cups frozen
veggies

Choose one to boost flavor:

- squeeze of lemon or lime juice
- grated parmesan
- 2 T tomato paste
- season to taste

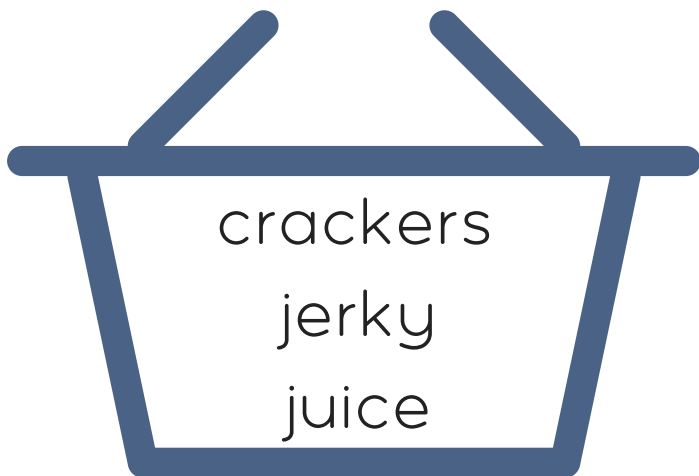
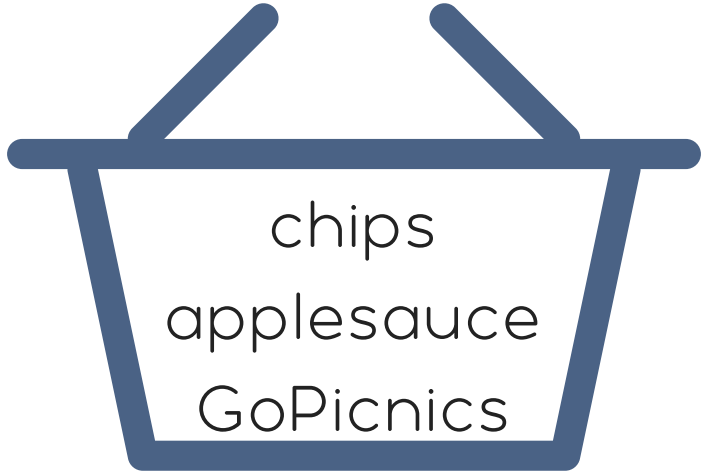
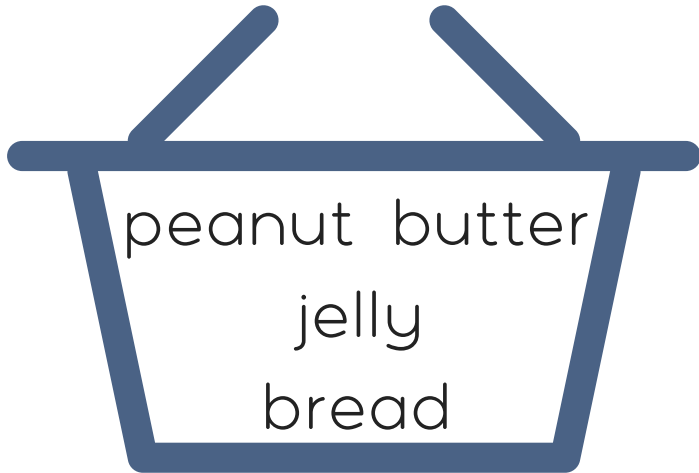
Season with:

Mexican:
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp chili powder
salt & pepper to
taste

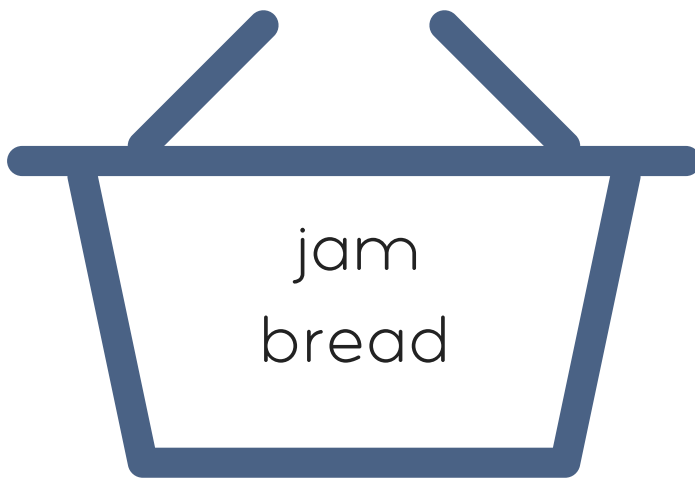
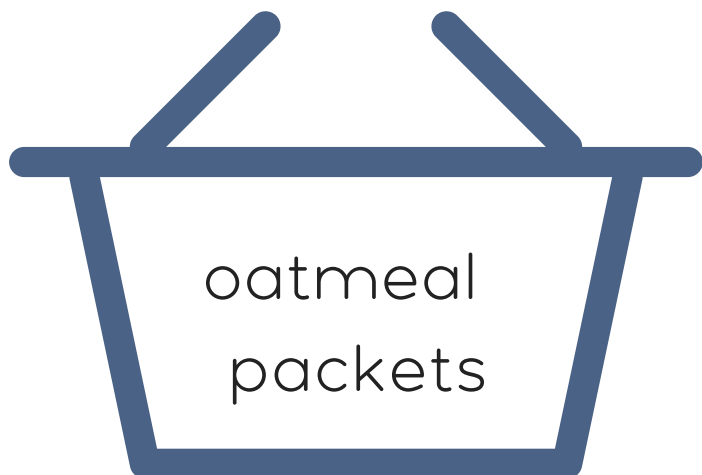
Italian:
1 tsp oregano
or
1 T Italian
seasoning

Homestyle:
1 tsp thyme
1 tsp parsley
salt & pepper to
taste

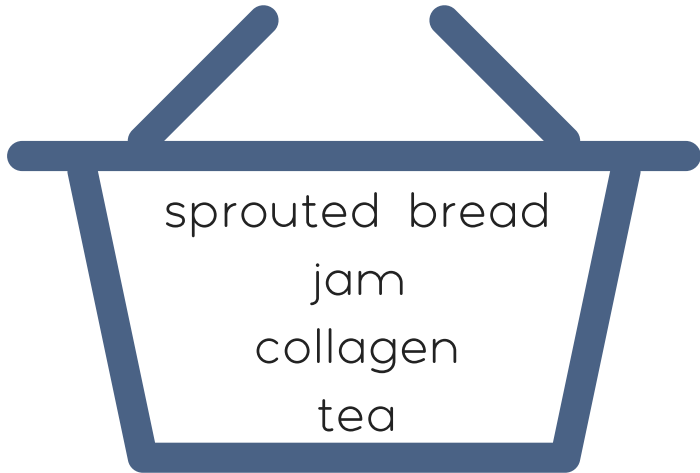
Pantry Basket kid-friendly lunches
& snacks



Pantry Basket kid-friendly breakfasts



Pantry Basket breakfasts



Prep Ahead eight steps to Perpetually Prepped

- Create your Plan A.
- Create your Plan B.
- Plan Your Prep
- Plan and Shop
- Spend some time in the kitchen
- Expand your pantry baskets
- Build New Habits
- Put it All Together

Prep Ahead weekly action plan checklist

- Check your refrigerator for foods that need to be used up. Prepare these foods so they are not wasted.
- Check your freezer and pantry inventory sheets to make sure they are up to date.
- Look over your meal plan for the week and identify items that can be prepped ahead and prepare them.
- Choose a pantry meal to assemble (if needed).
- Choose a freezer item and prepare it (if needed).
- Choose snacks and desserts and prep one or two for the week.
- Update your freezer and pantry inventory sheets as needed.

Prep Ahead action plan

Date:

Pantry Baskets:

Shop By:

Complete By:

Freezer Items:

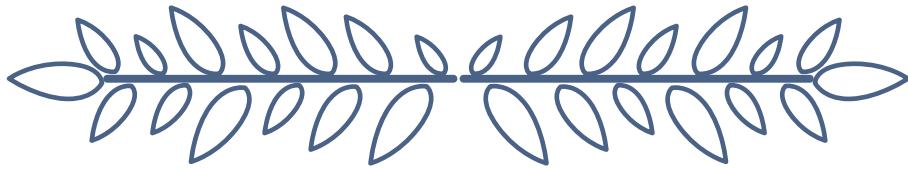
Goals

GOAL:

ACTION
STEPS:

WHY:

START DATE:



GOAL:

ACTION
STEPS:

WHY:

START DATE:

Pantry inventory

Inventory Date:

Item/Meal:

Quantity:

Exp. Date:

Grocery list

Date:

Meat & Fish

Produce

Dairy & Eggs

Deli

Drinks

Frozen

Other

Notes

Keep it stocked

[in the freezer]

Meat:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

Grains/ Legumes:

Other:

Keep it stocked

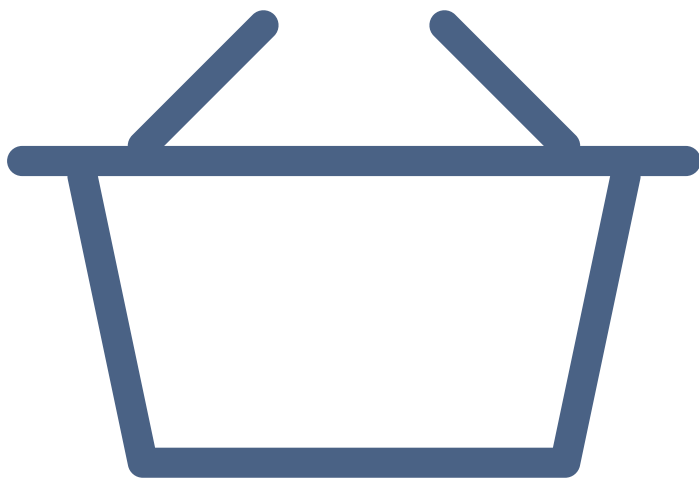
[in the pantry]

Item:

Quantity:

Use by:

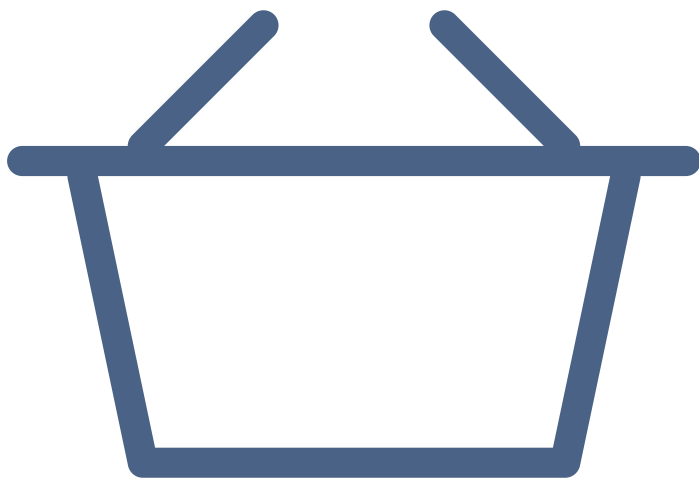
Pantry Basket meals



Pantry Basket kid-friendly lunches
& snacks



Pantry Basket kid-friendly breakfasts



Pantry Basket breakfasts



Prepahead

Meat:

Quantity/Amount:

Date:

Grains/ Legumes:

Other:

Quick-Thaw guidelines

Freezing Cooked Meat:

- Once meat is cooled completely: shred, crumble, or dice.
- Place in a labeled gallon-sized freezer bag.
- Spread the meat inside the bag so that it is arranged in a single, flat layer.
- Push excess air out.
- Seal tightly and freeze.

Thawing Methods:

Stovetop:

- Bring a big pot of water to 140 degrees (just a few bubbles).
- Keeping the frozen meat inside a sealed freezer bag, insert the bag in the hot water. It should thaw in less than 12 minutes, so start (carefully!) checking after 6 minutes or so.*

Sink:

- Place the sealed bag of meat in a colander and thaw under cold running water.

Microwave:

- Use the defrost option on your microwave.

Refrigerator:

- If you have the time, this is the safest method. Thaw the meat in a sealed bag in your meat drawer.

Thawing Tray:

- Thaw according to thawing tray directions. This method is pretty quick! You can see my favorite tray at workingathomeschool.com/ppkresources.

*This method is described as an FDA-approved method, but please research its safety for yourself! I am not a food expert and accept no liability for improperly thawed meat. These are suggestions, so please take them as such and always research your methods for maximum food safety.

Dedication

This ebook is for my five amazing kids, who ate more canned food than I would have thought possible while I was developing the recipes and writing this book. Thank you for listening to me and eating enough fresh fruits and veggies to avoid scurvy.

Thank you for being patient and kind while mommy was working so much. Everything I do that's worthwhile is influenced by you.

Love,
Mommy