

A Week of Easy Dinners

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In an ideal world

I would always have time to cook delicious food for my family.

But life isn't ideal! What can I do when life throws me something unexpected, so that I'm tired, busy, and stressed – and the last place I have time to be is in the kitchen?

I could eat out. Hmmm... Too expensive, and certainly not healthy! Chain restaurants make their food uniformly good by adding a concoction of chemicals and additives. Their food tastes good, but it's certainly not nourishing! And who can afford it? (I have seven kids!)

I could buy packaged food at the grocery store. Again, I can't find food without "natural flavors," monosodium glutamate, partially hydrogenated oils, and high-fructose corn syrup. In addition, the cost of packaged food for an entire family is very high. (I have seven kids!)

There are two keys to having fast and healthy food at home:

1. Having quality ingredients on hand.

I've provided a list of nutritious yet easy store-bought goods. Always keep these foods in your pantry and freezer. I like to use a red permanent marker and draw a star on each of these items. If I use up a package that has a red star on it, I'll be reminded to add that item to my next shopping list.

2. Knowing what I could make ahead of time.

I've provided a week's worth of easy recipes. Keep the recipes handy in your kitchen! If you realize that you're not going to have time to stick to your normal menu, grab one of these recipes. Dinner is saved!

Shopping List

Produce:

- Potatoes - 4
- Carrots – 3-4
- Onions - 5
- Green pepper - 1
- Lemons - 2
- Romaine lettuce – 1 head
- Garlic – 1

Boxes:

- Rice
- Elbow macaroni (1 pound)
- Lasagna noodles

Cans:

- Kidney beans (15 oz.) – 2
- Diced tomatoes (15 oz.) – 6
- Tomato paste (6 oz.) – 5
- Mushrooms (4 oz.) – 1

Pantry:

- Sea salt
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Active dry yeast
- Unbleached white flour
- Sugar (2 teaspoons)

Meat:

- Boneless beef rump roast (3 1/2 pounds)
- Boneless skinless chicken breasts (5 pounds)
- Ground beef (5 pounds)
- Ground turkey (1 pound)

Frozen:

- Chopped spinach (10 oz.)

Dairy:

- Butter
- Cheddar cheese, shredded
- Mozzarella cheese, shredded
- Parmesan cheese, shredded
- Eggs
- Sour cream
- Cottage cheese
- Ricotta cheese

Spices:

- Basil
- Black pepper
- Celery seed
- Chili powder
- Cumin
- Crushed red pepper
- Garlic powder
- Lemon pepper
- Minced garlic
- Minced onion
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme
- Steak Seasoning from Aldi
- Herby Seasoning from Frontier

Miscellaneous:

- Apple cider vinegar
- Red wine vinegar
- Dijon mustard
- Fish Sauce
- Homemade bread

Things to Do Ahead

☐ Make Roast Beef.

We typically use a rump roast when making roast beef. You can also use a round roast or a sirloin tip with these instructions. Choose a size that will feed your family, plus a little for leftovers.

Boneless rump roast, approximately 3 1/2 pounds
2 cups water
2 tbsp. dried, minced onion
1 tablespoon dried basil
1 tablespoon dried thyme
1 1/2 teaspoons dried rosemary
1 tablespoon sea salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground pepper

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place the roast in a deep pan and pour water around the roast. Sprinkle minced onion, basil, thyme, rosemary, salt and pepper over the top. Cover the pan and bake for 3 hours. If you need to bake it longer, just be sure to add a little extra water so it won't dry out and burn. The roast is done when it smells wonderful and is fork tender.

**I also like to use my crockpot for a roast. I get the best flavor when I cook it on low for 6 hours or more, being sure that I have plenty of water added and the lid is on tight.*

Allow the roast to cool to room temperature, then freeze it in a heavy resealable bag. Be sure to put today's date on the bag.

To thaw a cooked meat without a microwave, immerse the resealable bag in a large bowl of warm water. Change the water after 30 minutes. The meat should be thawed in 45-60 minutes.

Things to Do Ahead

Bake and Shred the Chicken.

1 pound boneless skinless chicken breasts
lemon pepper seasoning

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place chicken in a small baking dish and sprinkle with lemon pepper seasoning. Cover and bake 60 minutes. Shred chicken with a fork or cut into small pieces with a knife.

Allow the chicken to cool to room temperature, then freeze it in a heavy resealable bag. Be sure to put today's date on the bag.

Menu

Sunday	Sunday Roast Casserole
Monday	Caesar Dinner Salad
Tuesday	Bruschetta Chicken Skillet
Wednesday	Pizza
Thursday	Goulash
Friday	Spinach Chicken Lasagna
Saturday	Chili

Sunday Dinner Casserole

2 pounds cooked roast beef (see p. 4)
4 medium potatoes
3 medium carrots
1 onion
2 tablespoons olive oil
4 tablespoons butter
Steak seasoning

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grab a cutting board and a big knife and cut the roast into bite-size pieces. Scrub the potatoes and cut them into bite-size pieces as well. Scrub the carrots and cut into 1/2-inch slices. Finally, chop the onion into small pieces.

Drizzle olive oil over the bottom of a 9"x13" glass cooking dish. Toss the meat, potatoes, carrots and onion in the dish. Shake steak seasoning all over the food. Place chunks of butter over the top. Cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 90 minutes, stirring and covering again after 45 minutes.

Serve with warm bread or a fresh salad.

Bruschetta Chicken Skillet

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
1 onion, chopped
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 green pepper, chopped
2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breast halves
1 can (15 oz.) diced tomatoes
1 tablespoon dried basil
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
Juice of 1 lemon
Cooked rice
Shredded mozzarella and/or parmesan cheese

Heat olive oil and butter in a large pan. Add onions, garlic and peppers; cook until vegetables are tender, stirring often. Place chicken pieces on top of vegetables and reduce heat to low. Add diced tomatoes, basil, crushed red pepper, vinegar, and lemon juice. Cover and simmer 30 minutes, or until chicken is tender.

Meanwhile, cook enough rice to serve your family. Serve over rice, sprinkled with cheese.

Pizza

We've found that we can have this pizza on the table almost as fast as we can call take-out. It's delicious and easy to customize.

1/2 pound homemade turkey sausage
1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste
3/4 cup water
2 teaspoons dried basil
2 teaspoons dried oregano
2 teaspoons dried thyme
4 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
1/2 cup shredded parmesan cheese
Optional toppings: chopped green pepper, chopped onion, or chopped mushrooms

Grease 2 large cookie sheets. Preheat oven to 425°F. Prepare crust. Mix tomato paste, water, and seasonings to make sauce. Divide dough in half. Pat each half into a large circle on cookie sheet with oiled fingers. Spoon tomato-sauce mixture over dough. Sprinkle with cheeses. Top with sausage and optional toppings. Bake pizzas 15 to 20 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

Pizza Crust

1 1/2 tablespoons active dry yeast
2 cups warm water
5 cups unbleached white flour
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons salt

Dissolve yeast in warm water in medium bowl. Stir in remaining ingredients. Beat vigorously 20 strokes. Let rest 5 minutes.

Turkey Sausage

1 pound ground turkey
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon sea salt
1 teaspoon dried sage
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Brown turkey with butter in a skillet. Add seasonings and simmer 5 minutes.

Goulash

The celery seed makes the difference in this simple comfort food.

2 pounds ground beef
1 onion, chopped
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon celery seed
2 teaspoons sea salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground pepper
2 cans (15 oz.) diced tomatoes
2 cans (6 oz.) tomato paste
1 1/2 cups water
1 (1 lb.) package elbow macaroni
Parmesan cheese, shredded

Brown the beef with the onions and garlic in a large pot over medium heat. Add seasonings, diced tomatoes, tomato paste, and water. Mix well. Reduce heat to low; cover. Simmer 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add cooked macaroni and stir well.

Serve with generous toppings of Parmesan cheese. This meal tastes even better the next day.

Spinach Chicken Lasagna

This dish costs a little more than some of the others, but it's easy for company or a special family dinner.

- 1 can (4 oz.) mushrooms
- 1 can (15 oz.) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste
- 3/4 cup water
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 1 pound cooked chicken, chopped or shredded (see p. 5)
- 2 eggs
- 1 pkg. (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and well drained
- 1 container (15 oz.) ricotta cheese
- 1 container (16 oz.) cottage cheese
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- 1/2 box lasagna noodles, uncooked

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a bowl, combine mushrooms, tomatoes, tomato paste, water, and seasonings. In a second bowl, mix chicken, eggs, spinach, ricotta cheese, cottage cheese and mozzarella cheese. Mix well.

Spoon about 1/2 cup of sauce into a 9"x13" glass baking dish. Place 4 or 5 lasagna noodles over sauce, then spoon half of the remaining sauce over noodles. Spread half of the cheese mixture over sauce. Repeat with more noodles, remaining sauce and remaining cheese mixture. Sprinkle parmesan cheese over the top. Bake for 45 minutes.

Allow to sit for about 10 minutes before serving for easier cutting.

Caesar Dinner Salad

1 large head romaine lettuce
Parmesan cheese, shredded
4 slices of homemade bread (or one slice per person)
Butter
Garlic powder
4 cooked chicken breasts (or one per person)
1 lemon
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 clove garlic
1/2 cup olive oil

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spread butter on each slice of bread. Sprinkle with garlic powder. Slice into cubes, then toast in the oven on a cookie sheet for 10 minutes, stirring a couple times. Allow to cool slightly.

Core the lettuce, then rinse it, drain and pat dry. Tear the leaves into bite-size pieces and place on individual serving plates.

Sprinkle plenty of parmesan cheese on each serving of lettuce. Sprinkle toasted bread cubes over the cheese.

Slice each chicken breast lengthwise into about 8 pieces. Arrange on top of salads.

Cut the lemon in half and squeeze the juice of the lemon into a bowl. Add vinegar, mustard, fish sauce, and pepper. Peel the garlic and finely chop it; add to the bowl. Whisk until well combined. Add the olive oil slowly in a thin stream, whisking constantly until it is thoroughly blended in and the mixture is thickened.

Pour dressing over salads, then toss each to coat. Enjoy!

Chili

I've noticed that busy days come in pairs. This meal makes plenty so you can put some away in the freezer or save some for lunch the next day, which is likely to be busy as well.

3 pounds ground beef
2 onions, chopped
2 cans (15 oz.) kidney beans, rinsed
2 cans (15 oz.) diced tomatoes
1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste
3/4 cup water
2 tablespoons chili powder
2 tablespoons minced garlic
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 tablespoon dried cumin
1 tablespoon sea salt
1 1/2 teaspoons freshly ground pepper
Cooked rice
Shredded cheddar cheese
Sour cream

Brown the beef with the onions over medium heat. Add beans, tomatoes, tomato paste, water, and seasonings. Mix well. Reduce heat to low; cover. Simmer 30-60 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, cook enough rice to serve your family. Serve chili with rice, cheese and dollops of sour cream.