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FOODS IN FRONT

A Monthly Newsletter by the CMH Dietitians

Food prep 101



How do you eat healthier when you have a busy life with work, family, and more?

Sometimes it seems like the only options are either 1) spending a ton of time cooking every single night, or 2) grabbing fast food or takeout.

With a small window of time on your weekend (even just 30 minutes to an hour), you can make healthy, home-cooked meals *just* as convenient as it would be to buy takeout - and for a fraction of the price.

Don't believe it? Test it out and see for yourself:

Check out the meal prep strategies listed on the next page and think about which strategy feels more realistic for your life and your preferences. Depending on which style of food prep feels right to you, make a short grocery list to prep in bulk. Start with either one full meal or 2-3 individual foods (e.g. potatoes, chicken, beef, a vegetable side, etc.).

When you start working on the foods you chose, start a stopwatch on your phone, and when you finish, hit "stop." You'd be surprised at how quickly you can get a full week's worth of lunches or dinners finished, to grab, throw in the microwave, and be ready to eat - especially when you compare it to sitting in a drive through for 5-10 minutes per day.

The most important thing to remember: when you start prepping meals, start basic and easy. There is time down the road to switch it up and try fun, complex new recipes - but to start, make some simple foods that won't take up your entire day (try searching "30 minute meal prep" online), and will still provide you the nutrition you need.



Strategy 1: if you don't mind routine, and you want something easy and *done*

Try preparing full meals to portion out into individual portions. Aim for at least a protein source, a starchy carbohydrate, and a non-starchy vegetable in every meal. You can add more foods than this, but this is the basic structure you should start with.

For ideas, google "sheet pan meals," "one pan meals," "meal prep ideas."

To practice, a meal of roasted chicken breast, red potatoes, and green beans or broccoli is a simple and quick starting point. (Recipe on page 3)

After you've made the entire meal in bulk, portion out into individual plastic containers to reheat during the week.

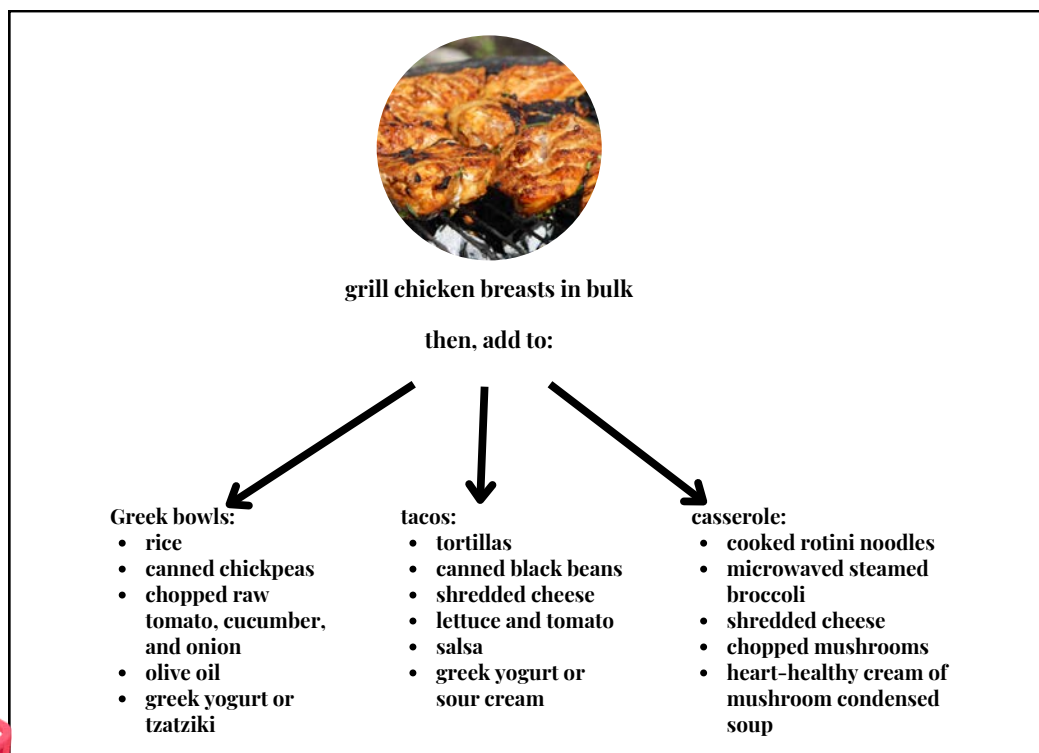
Strategy 2: if you get bored easily, and you want more variety in the week

Pre-prepare meal "components" that would probably take you the most time to cook (i.e. what would take up "too much time" if you were to do it every night of the week).

These might be your proteins (chicken, beef, turkey, steak, fish), rice or beans if cooking from scratch (microwaved or canned will be quick enough not to have to prep ahead of time!), or roasting vegetables in olive oil ahead of time.

You can decide on the "theme" of the meal on the day of, and use these components in a mix-and-match, but they're already set and pre-cooked for you.

See the example below for an idea of using 1 pre-prepared meal component (chicken) to add to minimal/no-prep foods on the day of, to finish the meal in 5-10 minutes.



Make-ahead meal prep ideas

Chicken, potato, and broccoli sheet pan meal

Makes 4 servings; requires a large sheet pan

Ingredients

- 3 bone-in chicken breasts
- 1 lb baby potatoes, cut in half
- 6 cups fresh broccoli florets
- 4 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp DASH Italian seasoning blend
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Mix 2 Tbsp olive oil, garlic powder, onion powder, salt/pepper, and Italian seasoning in a large bowl.
3. Add baby potatoes to bowl and toss to coat. Lay flat on sheet pan.
4. Add broccoli to bowl and toss to coat. Add to sheet pan to create a single layer of broccoli and potatoes.
5. Use the leftover olive oil mixture to coat chicken breasts. Add to center of sheet pan.
6. Place pan in preheated oven and cook for 35-40 minutes until chicken is cooked through to an internal temperature of 165°F.
7. Separate into 4 servings in individual meal-prep containers. Store for up to 4 days in refrigerator and microwave until hot on the day of use.

High protein pesto pasta salad

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients

- 12 oz grilled chicken breast
- 6 ounces Banza rotini noodles
- 2 8 oz fresh mozzarella, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 2 cups sliced mini cucumbers
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 1/3 cup diced red onion
- 1/2 cup store-bought pesto
- 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Directions:

1. Dice grilled chicken into small cubes.
2. Cook Banza pasta according to package instructions, drain and let cool.
3. Add cooled noodles, chicken, mozzarella, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, Parmesan cheese, and pesto to a large bowl. Mix well to coat all foods evenly with pesto.
4. Portion into 4 servings and store in individual meal-prep containers. Store for up to 4 days in refrigerator and eat cold at time of use.