

Kitchen shortcuts for faster homemade meals

It's hard to find time to get a home-cooked meal on the table when meal times come around. Many people are juggling work, responsibilities with family, housework and kids' activities, to name a few.

Plus, for those who aren't experts in the kitchen, cooking dinner can seem like an impossible task. But, if you learn to take some shortcuts, it can be easier than you think. Try these tips to help you make a homemade meal with fewer hassles:



- **Purchase a few meals at once.** If you can't shop for a whole week, aim for three meals. Get the ingredients for those meals, and you'll be ready for half of your week without any extra trips to the store.
- **Do a big chopping session.** Clean and chop all veggies and fruits at once while you've got out your cutting board and knife. Then, put the ingredients in bags or containers with lids, and put them in the fridge or freezer. Once you're ready to cook dinner, your chopped ingredients are ready to be cooked or thrown into the dish you're preparing.
- **Freeze extra.** Consider buying extra onions, carrots, green beans, or other veggies that frequently need to be chopped. Chop up more than you need, put the extras in freezer bags, and freeze until the next time you need them.
- **Make a big batch of rice or whole grains.** When cooking rice, quinoa, or other grains, cook extra, place it in bags, and freeze. Simply thaw and microwave your grains when you're ready to use them.
- **Plan ahead.** Tackle the next meal before you go to bed the night before. Start thawing any frozen meats or other ingredients in the fridge. Make sure you have the ingredients and recipe you need for the next day.
- **Double up.** Whenever possible, make a double recipe and freeze the extra. Soups, stews, meats and tomato-based sauces often freeze well. Frozen leftovers make a quick and nutritious meal on a busy night.
- **Check out make-ahead meals for the slow cooker.** You can find slow cooker freezer meals online that allow you to make it ahead, throw the prepped meal in a bag, and freeze. Then, you have a meal that's ready to put into the slow cooker in the morning to be ready for dinner time.

Most successful meals come down to planning in advance. This means you may need to do the prep work the night before or on the weekend. Though it requires some effort to make a home-cooked meal, it's worth the time and energy. You'll be able to make a healthy meal for you and your family and may save some money, too.