

Quick, Easy, & Budget-Friendly Meal Ideas

From Cornell Health nutritionists

Quick tips:

- ✓ Cook large portions of proteins and/or starches for use in meals throughout the week.
 - For example, cook a batch of chicken to use in stir-fries, burritos or sandwiches.
- ✓ Canned beans and canned tuna, chicken or salmon are quick and portable proteins.
 - Other quick and easy proteins include rotisserie chicken, peanut butter, tofu, and eggs.
- ✓ Potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, pasta, breads, and beans are quick options for starches.
- ✓ Using prepared foods as part of a meal will save time. For example, add frozen spinach to premade frozen tortellini or ravioli.
- ✓ Many grains are “quick-cook.” Some examples are couscous, instant oatmeal or minute rice.
- ✓ Frozen and canned vegetables and fruit are just as nutritious as fresh, and are often cheaper and help reduce food waste.
 - Microwave frozen veggies for 3 to 5 minutes to prepare.
- ✓ Plan ahead for the week to quickly prepare meals during your busy week!

Balance meals:

Protein + starch + fruit / vegetable

Balance meals by including a protein, starch, and fruit or vegetable!

Refer to the following pages for meal component ideas, quick meal ideas, easy recipes, and other resources.



Meal component ideas

(No-cook, minimal prep, and dorm-friendly!)

Combine food choices from each of the groups below to create quick meals.

PROTEIN (pre-cooked or no cook):

- Frozen meatballs (turkey/beef/chicken) or vegetarian “meatballs”
- Frozen pre-cooked shrimp
- Pre-cooked chicken or turkey sausage
- Packaged deli meats
- Rotisserie chicken
- Canned beans or lentils
- Canned refried beans
- Canned chili (vegetarian or meat-based)
- Canned salmon, sardines or other fish
- Canned or “envelopes” of tuna
- Smoked fish
- Canned chicken
- Veggie burgers
- Veggie “sausage” (often seitan-based) or other vegetarian options such as veggies “chicken nuggets”
- Dairy or Soy-based Yogurt, milk, or cheese
- Peanut butter, almond butter or Sunflower butter
- Hummus
- Pre-cooked eggs (hard boiled, scrambled, egg, omelet “rounds”)
- Frozen peas or edamame

STARCH (pre-cooked, microwavable, or no-cook):

- Pre-cooked rice, quinoa or other grains
- Pre-cooked pasta/noodles or instant noodles / ramen noodles
- Canned beans or lentils
- Frozen Steam-in-the-bag or canned sweet potatoes, yams, winter squash, peas or corn
- Bread, tortillas, buns, English muffins, bagels, rolls, naan, pita bread, crackers or biscuits
- Frozen waffles or pancakes
- Cereals or granola
- Instant Oatmeal or overnight oats

FRUIT / VEGETABLES (fresh, canned, frozen, or freeze-dried):

- Steamable packages of vegetables
- Frozen broccoli, carrots, or green beans, etc.
- Pre-washed bags of spinach or salad kits
- Any fresh fruit (apples, oranges, pears, bananas, etc)
- Any frozen fruit (blueberries, mango, pineapples, etc.)
- Canned vegetable or fruits
- Freeze dried apples or other fruits or vegetables

Putting it all together ...

Examples include:

- Create a grain bowl by stacking a pre-cooked grain, beans, cheese, vegetables (like frozen corn, fresh tomato slices, or pre-washed spinach) and top with a dressing (such as purchased tahini or lemon dill sauce or salsa and sour cream).
- Use a salad kit as a base and add canned chickpeas, cheese, canned tuna, dressing and a roll/bread/naan on the side.
- Toaster waffles topped with blueberries and syrup with pre-cooked (or microwaved) eggs on the side or a large glass of milk.

Quick meal ideas

Breakfast ideas:

- English muffin or a bagel with nut butter and piece of fruit
- Eggs, toast, and fruit with milk or soy milk
- Omelet or egg/tofu scramble with veggies, English muffin with spread and fruit
- Frozen waffles or pancakes topped with yogurt, syrup, and berries
- Cereal, milk/soymilk, fruit, and toast with peanut butter
- Large yogurt parfait with granola and 100% fruit juice
- Breakfast burrito or taco with eggs, cheese, meat, onions, and peppers
- Ham, eggs, toast with spread, and fruit
- Oatmeal with raisins and nuts/nut butter, and a banana
- Feta cheese or labne, flatbread, and cucumbers
- Lox, bagel, tomatoes, onion
- Congee with a protein like hard-boiled eggs or tofu and leftover cooked vegetables
- A protein bar and banana
- Breakfast sandwich with eggs, cheese on an English muffin or bagel (try the microwaved egg recipe below!) with fruit on the side

Lunch or dinner ideas:

- Burrito or tostada with beans, meat, or fish, salsa, veggies
- Stir-fry with beef, chicken, or tofu, veggie, rice and sauce
- Poke Bowl (include a protein such as fish or tofu, vegetables, rice and sauce)
- Sandwich or sub made with a protein (tuna, turkey, seitan, ham, roast beef, chicken), lettuce, and onion, and a spread like mayonnaise or aioli, plus fruit
- Pita filled with hummus and cucumber slices and/or roasted veggies with fresh fruit
- Grilled cheese sandwich, tomato soup, and glass of milk
- Protein of choice, root vegetable like plantain, yucca, yams, with avocado and a side salad
- Broiled Salmon, baked potato with sour cream and frozen green beans
- Rice or quinoa bowl topped with pre-cooked chicken, beans veggies and cheese
- Turkey wrap with veggies, fruit, and pretzels with hummus
- Store-bought pizza crust topped with tomato sauce, cheese, spinach and canned mushrooms slices
- Hearty salad with tofu or chicken, beans, nuts/seeds, dried fruit, cheese, dressing and a starch like pre-cooked quinoa or rice or bread with butter on the side.
- Chicken sopes with whole grain bread

10-minute meals

Protein	Starch	Fruit or non-starchy veggie
Broiled fish	Minute brown rice	Bagged spinach salad and dressing
Hummus, tuna fish (tuna & mayo), chicken, or egg salad sandwiches	Whole grain bread	Fruit or baby carrots
Scrambled eggs or tofu scramble	Whole grain toast and butter	Canned or fresh fruit
Canned chili (meat or vegetarian)	Microwave baked potato(es)	Broccoli (frozen)
Pre-cooked shrimp or tofu	Minute brown rice	Frozen stir-fry veg mix
Burrito with canned beans	Whole grain tortillas	Salsa, onions, peppers
Milk or soy milk	Whole grain oats or cereal	Fresh fruit
Ground turkey burger or veggie burger and cheese	Whole wheat bun	Sliced tomato, onions and mushrooms
Rotisserie chicken or canned black beans	Baked sweet potato (microwave)	Bagged Arugula with dressing
Deli turkey, ham, chicken, roast beef, or seitan	Whole wheat pitas	Sliced peppers, onions, tomatoes
Pre-made frozen meat balls or “non-meat crumbles” and shredded cheese	Pasta	Frozen veggie

Quick & easy recipes

Super-speedy microwaved scrambled eggs

Ingredients: 2 eggs, cooking spray or oil/butter, 2 Tablespoons milk (optional), salt and pepper to taste.

1. Spray a clean coffee mug with cooking spray or wipe lightly with vegetable oil or butter.
2. Whisk eggs, milk, salt and pepper in the mug. If desired, add cheese, pre-cooked sausage or pepperoni or a vegetable such as spinach. Cover loosely with a napkin or paper towel.
3. Microwave on medium-high (70% power) for 1 minute and 30 seconds to 1 minute and 45 seconds, stirring several times during cooking.
4. Cover and let stand for 30 seconds to 1 minute before serving. Eggs will look slightly moist, but will finish cooking upon standing.

Yummy baked sweet potatoes with black beans in minutes

Ingredients: One sweet potato or yam, 15-oz can of black beans (drained), salsa, sour cream and cheese, to taste.

1. Scrub the potato under warm water to clean. Pat dry. Cut away any blemishes.
2. Poke holes in the potato with a fork (4 -5 times on each side to allow steam to escape).
3. Microwave on full power for about 5 minutes.
4. Carefully, check and turn the potato using tongs or an oven mitt.
5. Cook for about another 3 to 5 minutes until a fork is easily inserted.
6. Slice the potato open and top with black beans, salsa, sour cream and cheese to taste!

Additional resources

Recipe and meal-planning resources:

- Budget Bytes: <https://www.budgetbytes.com/>
- Mashup Mom Aldi Meal plans: <https://www.mashupmom.com/free-aldi-meal-plan-week-of-9-26-21/>
- Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables: <https://jsyfruitveggies.org/recipes-all/low-cost-meals/>
- Pulses.org (Lentils, legumes): <https://pulses.org/us/pulse-recipes/>
- Work Week Lunch: <https://workweeklunch.com/>

Meal delivery – some local options:

- Rose's Homedish: <https://www.roshomedish.com/about>
- Power Full Food: <https://www.powerfullithaca.com/>
- Factor 75: <https://go.factor75.com/>

Meal delivery kits:

- Hello Fresh: <https://www.hellofresh.com/>
- Blue Apron: <https://www.blueapron.com/>
- Purple Carrot: <https://www.purplecarrot.com/>