



Freezer Meal Planning

Darlene Christensen, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

WHAT IS FREEZER MEAL PLANNING?

Freezer meal planning involves planning meals that can be frozen ahead of time. Meals are prepared, labeled, and frozen. The end result is having meals prepared in the freezer when they are needed.

HOW IS FREEZER MEAL PLANNING DONE?

Freezer meal planning can be done in a variety of ways. A few of these include:

- Prepare double batches of favorite casseroles, soups or other recipes that will freeze well. Eat one that night and place the other in the freezer to use later.
- Create a freezer meal exchange group. Each member brings enough main entrees for each of the other people in the group. For example: if there are five people in the exchange group, each would bring four freezable meals to give to each member. Each member will have five freezer meals (including their own).

- **The first time freezer meal planning is attempted, use recipes from an established freezer plan.**
- **Then, use your own recipes and create your own shopping lists.**
- **A 1-week meal plan using ground beef and chicken is provided in this publication.**

- Follow a freezer meal plan that is for 1 week, 2 weeks or 1 month. Many freezer meal plans are available through books and Internet sites. A 1-week freezer meal plan is included in this publication.

WHY FREEZE MEALS?

- Saves money by reducing food waste, eating out less and preparing inexpensive meals.
- Saves time by combining shopping and preparation tasks.
- Improves nutrition by eating meals prepared at home.
- Improves food safety by using freezer to preserve foods.
- Enhances family meal time by spending time together at enjoyable family meals.
- Saves decision making by already knowing what is for dinner.
- Shares work load by having the family join in the fun and prepare the dishes together.

PREPARING A 1-WEEK FREEZER MEAL PLAN

1-Week Menu

Easy, Cheesy Pasta
Sloppy Joes
Chili
Pasta and Meat Sauce
Chicken Enchilada Casserole
Orange Teriyaki Chicken
Homemade Pockets

Purchase food and storage items listed on shopping list provided. Everything you will need to prepare the recipes is on the shopping list (next page). A blank shopping list is also included at the end of this publication for future planning. It is recommended you shop the day before you prepare the recipes. To save time, you don't need put away non-perishable ingredients. Make sure to put all perishable items in the refrigerator. Place frozen bread dough in refrigerator overnight to thaw.

Organize your work space. Tape recipes on cupboards or another place where they are easy to read. If you plan to use the recipes over again, place them in a sheet protector. Create combined work areas for dishes using similar ingredients. For example, put all recipes and ingredients using ground beef in the same area.

In order to complete the 1-Week Menu Plan, the first recipe to start is the Meat Sauce Mix. Brown ground beef, drain fat and add other ingredients. Meat Sauce Mix will be used to make the Easy, Cheesy Pasta; Sloppy Joes; Spaghetti and Chili. While browning the beef, boil water for the macaroni in Easy, Cheesy Pasta. When ground beef is browned, drain fat and add other ingredients.

Place 2 cups of Meat Sauce Mix in each of three freezer bags. To complete chili recipe, add chili powder and drained kidney beans; label and date. To complete sloppy joes, add vinegar, brown sugar and ketchup; label and date. To complete spaghetti add Italian seasoning. See recipe below for further directions. Label and date.

To complete Easy, Cheesy Pasta, drain macaroni. Place final 2 cups Meat Sauce Mix in freezer bag. Add macaroni, chili beans and grated cheese. Mix ingredients together by squishing outside of bag. Remove excess air from bag; label and date.

Once food is cooled, lay freezer bags flat on counter and remove excess air. Zip bags closed and place in freezer.

To complete the Orange Teriyaki Chicken recipe, combine all ingredients, except chicken, in a freezer bag. Then add chicken breasts. Zip, release air and shake bag until marinade covers breasts. Label, date and put bag in freezer.

How to Quick Freeze

Quick freezing prevents foods from sticking together. To quick freeze, Homemade Pockets spread them onto a clean cookie sheet. If needed, use more than one cookie sheet.

Place the cookie sheet(s) into the freezer. Freeze for about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Freezing the Homemade Pockets on a cookie sheet before placing them in freezer bags will keep them from clumping together.

Cooling Food

How Long Should I Leave Food to Cool Down Before Freezing it?

Food should be cooled as quickly as possible. It should be left out no longer than 2 hours to prevent growth of bacteria. This includes all of the time it is out of the refrigerator (ex: in grocery store, while food is being prepared, time to cool food. You also must consider the time food will be out when you serve it.)

Can Food be Cooled Down More Quickly?

There is no easy way to speed up cooling, but you can try the following:

- Divide food into smaller portions
- Place in well-sealed containers and run under cold water
- Place in a well-sealed container and stand it in a shallow tray of cold water.

Why Can't I Put Hot Food Straight into the Fridge or Freezer?

Hot food will warm other foods and could raise the temperature of the refrigerator.

To complete chicken enchilada casserole recipe either purchase 1 lb raw chicken and cook or purchase 1 lb of rotisserie or precooked chicken. Shred chicken. Follow recipe, using a 9 x 11" disposable pan. Cover with heavy duty foil, label and freeze. Put cooking instructions on label.

Follow recipe to make homemade pockets. Quick freeze Homemade Pockets on a cookie sheet before placing them into freezer bags. This will prevent the pockets from sticking together when frozen. See information of quick freezing above. Date, label and freeze pockets in freezer bags.

When you are ready to use the frozen entrees, take food items out of the freezer the night before and thaw in the refrigerator.

1-Week Freezer Meal Plan Grocery List

Canned & Packaged Goods 1 can (4 oz) green chilies 2 cans nacho cheese soup 1 can (15 oz) tomato soup 2 cans tomato sauce 2 cans chili beans 2 cans (16 oz) kidney beans	Staples Soy sauce Minced garlic Canola oil Ground pepper Ground ginger Red pepper sauce 1 pkg spaghetti seasoning Garlic powder Salt Vinegar Brown sugar Ketchup Chili powder	Fruits & Vegetables 2 onions	Breads & Cereals 1 pkg flour tortillas (whole wheat if possible) 6 oz macaroni (enough for 2 cups cooked) Hamburger buns 8 oz pasta (spaghetti)
*Dairy Foods 3/4 cup cheddar cheese 1 3/4 cup mozzarella cheese 1 pkg cheese (any kind for pockets)	*Meat & Poultry 1 lb cooked chicken (purchase raw chicken and cook or purchase pre-cooked or rotisserie chicken) 6 chicken breasts 4 lbs ground beef or turkey Cooked ham or other filling for Homemade Pockets	*Frozen Foods 6 oz can orange juice concentrate Frozen bread dough (or you may be able to purchase fresh bread dough from your local bakery)	Freezing Supplies 1 gallon freezer bags Heavy-duty tin foil 1 - 9 x 12" pan
<p><i>* These foods need to be purchased last to protect their safety and quality.</i></p>			

List includes items for one batch of *Meat Sauce Mix* which will be used for Easy, Cheesy Pasta; Sloppy Joes; Spaghetti and Chili.

1-Week Meal Planning Recipes

Meat Sauce Mix

4 lbs lean ground beef or turkey
1 medium onion, minced
1 can (6 oz) tomato paste plus 6 ounce can water
or 1 can tomato soup
2 cans (15 oz) tomato sauce
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp salt

Brown meat; drain fat. Add all other ingredients. Simmer 20 to 30 minutes. Add water or tomato juice to thin if necessary. Immediately place 1 cup portions in freezer-quality, plastic zip-top bags. Freeze. Makes 8 cups.

NOTE: Use Meat Sauce Mix for Easy, Cheesy Pasta; Sloppy Joes; spaghetti and chili.

Easy, Cheesy Pasta

2 cups *Meat Sauce Mix* (see recipe)
2 cans (16 oz) chili beans
4 cups cooked, drained macaroni
1 cup grated mozzarella cheese

Mix together chili beans, macaroni and Meat Sauce Mix. Add 1/2 cup grated cheese. Place mixture in freezer bag with date and cooking instructions. Date and label "Place in sauce pan. Heat over medium heat until bubbling. Add 1 Tbsp water if mixture is dry. Add 1/2 cup remaining cheese over pasta as it is served." Place remaining 1/2 cup cheese in smaller freezer bag. Tape bag to pasta mixture. Freeze. Serves 6-8.

NOTE: Prepare pasta noodles slightly undercooked so they do not get mushy after freezing.

Sloppy Joes

2 cups *Meat Sauce Mix*
1 Tbsp vinegar
1 Tbsp brown sugar
1/4 cup ketchup

In a gallon sized freezer bag mix *Meat Sauce Mix*, vinegar, brown sugar and ketchup. Seal, date and place instructions "Heat mix in microwave for 5 minutes. Toast buns in oven." Freeze with bag of hamburger buns.

NOTE: Microwaves do vary. Check mix regularly.

Spaghetti

2 cups *Meat Sauce Mix*
1-1/2 tsp Italian seasoning
or 1 package spaghetti sauce seasoning
8 oz pasta
Parmesan cheese (optional)

Mix *Meat Sauce Mix* and seasoning in a gallon freezer bag. Label, date and include instructions: "Heat meat sauce in microwave until heated through."

To make pasta:

In large pan, boil 3 quarts water. Add 1 tablespoon vegetable oil to reduce boiling over. Add 8 ounces of pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, noodles) gradually. Boil uncovered, stirring occasionally. Over stirring causes sticky pasta. Pasta should be tender, yet firm. Immediately drain in colander; do not rinse. Rinsing washes away valuable nutrients. Pour meat sauce over hot, cooked pasta. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Serves 4-6.

NOTE: Prepare pasta noodles slightly undercooked so they do not get mushy after freezing.

Chili

2 cups *Meat Sauce Mix*
2 tsp chili powder
2 cans (16 oz) drained kidney beans

In a gallon size freezer bag mix *Meat Sauce Mix*, chili powder and kidney beans. Date, label: "Heat through in microwave or in saucepan." Makes 4-6 servings.

Chicken Enchilada Casserole

1 lb cooked, diced, or shredded chicken
1/2 onion chopped
1 can (4 oz) green chilies, chopped
2 cans nacho cheese soup
1 package whole wheat flour tortillas
3/4 cup cheddar cheese, grated
3/4 cup mozzarella cheese, grated

Cut tortillas in quarters. Line bottom of casserole with tortillas, add a layer of chicken, a layer of soup mixed with green chilies and onion, and top with cheese; repeat. Cover with heavy foil, date and label, "Bake at 350° F for 20 minutes." Serves 8.

NOTE: Additional tortillas may be heated and served with casserole.

Orange Teriyaki Chicken

1/4 cup soy sauce
3 Tbsp chopped onion
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbsp olive or canola oil
1/2 tsp ground pepper
1/2 tsp ground ginger
1/2 tsp red pepper sauce
1 can (6 oz) orange juice concentrate
6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

Combine all ingredients except chicken. Place chicken breasts in freezer bag and pour marinade over chicken. Freeze in gallon bag, date and label: "Grill chicken 4-6 inches from heat source for 35-40 minutes." Serves 6.

Homemade Pockets

1 loaf frozen bread dough (thawed)
Fillings for Homemade Pockets (suggestions: ham & cheese, pizza ingredients, broccoli and cheese, shredded chicken)

Roll half of the dough out to form a 12x14 inch rectangles. Cut the rectangle into 16 squares. Place 3 to 4 tablespoons of filling in the middles of 8 of the squares. Moisten edges of squares with water. Top with 8 remaining squares. Press dough firmly around edges.

Lay on wax paper in cookie sheets in freezer for 10 to 20 minutes. This is known as "quick freezing" and will prevent pockets from sticking together in freezer. Place in freezer bag, date and label: "Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until golden brown."

Other Sources

Cook Once: Eat for Two Weeks. University of Wyoming CentSible Nutrition.
http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/centsible/tvshows/cook_once.asp

Freezing Combination Main Dishes. Ohio State University Cooperative Extension. <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5308a.html>

Freezing Resources. University of Minnesota Extension.
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/components/pdfs/freezingresources.pdf>

Make-Ahead Meals. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.
<http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/factshts/FN-SSB.095.PDF>

Freezing Prepared Foods. Clemson Extension.
<http://lib.store.yahoo.net/lib/canning-pantry/freezing-prepared-food.pdf>

Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran's status. USU's policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic related practices and decisions.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status, refuse to hire; discharge; promote; demote; terminate; discriminate in compensation; or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person otherwise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.