How to Meal Prep for the Week (Step by Step for Beginners)

Family Life · about 17 minutes · 2026-11-11

A fully illustrated 33-step guide to meal prepping for a busy week: plan a real menu, shop once, batch-cook safely, portion and store, then reheat without losing quality.

Phase 1 — Plan a Week You Will Actually Eat

1. **Block the nights you need food ready**
   Block the nights you need food ready.
2. **Pick two repeatable base meals**
   Pick two repeatable base meals.
3. **Plan one protein two ways**
   Plan one protein two ways.
4. **Include one freeze-ahead meal**
   Include one freeze-ahead meal.
5. **Write the menu beside the shopping list**
   Write the menu beside the shopping list.
6. **Do a quick pantry and fridge audit**
   Do a quick pantry and fridge audit.
7. **Group the list by store section**
   Group the list by store section.
8. **Buy in the quantities the menu needs**
   Buy in the quantities the menu needs.
9. **Choose containers before you cook**
   Choose containers before you cook.

Phase 2 — Prep and Batch-Cook

10. **Clear and sanitise the prep surface**
    Clear and sanitise the prep surface.
11. **Set out board, knife and bowls**
    Set out board, knife and bowls.
12. **Start the longest-cooking item first**
    Start the longest-cooking item first.
13. **Wash and dry all produce**
    Wash and dry all produce.
14. **Chop once for every meal**
    Chop once for every meal.
15. **Roast a full tray of vegetables**
    Roast a full tray of vegetables.

16. **Cook the grain or pasta to just-done**

    Cook the grain or pasta to just-done.

17. **Season in two halves**

    Season in two halves.

18. **Make one sauce to tie meals together**

    Make one sauce to tie meals together.

Phase 3 — Cool, Portion and Store Safely

19. **Cool cooked food promptly**

    Cool cooked food promptly.

20. **Label every container with date and contents**

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21. **Portion to real meal sizes**

    Portion to real meal sizes.

22. **Store sauces and toppings separately**

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23. **Freeze what you will not eat in four days**

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24. **Put the soonest meals at the front**

    Put the soonest meals at the front.

25. **Keep raw and cooked items apart**

    Keep raw and cooked items apart.

26. **Write a fridge inventory**

    Write a fridge inventory.

Phase 4 — Reheat, Refresh and Repeat

27. **Reheat gently with a splash of water**

    Reheat gently with a splash of water.

28. **Add something fresh at the last minute**

    Add something fresh at the last minute.

29. **Crisp roasted items in a hot pan**

    Crisp roasted items in a hot pan.

30. **Thaw frozen meals in the fridge overnight**

    Thaw frozen meals in the fridge overnight.

31. **Note what was eaten and what was not**

    Note what was eaten and what was not.

32. **Reuse the shopping list and timing**

    Reuse the shopping list and timing.

33. **Rotate one new meal in**

    Rotate one new meal in.

Sources

1. Good Housekeeping — home and style
   https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/
2. NHS — Live Well
   https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/
3. King Arthur Baking — baking guides
   https://www.kingarthurbaking.com/
4. WebMD — health information
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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-Meal-Prep. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/corrections