

# ESTABLISH A FOOD PREP ROUTINE

Once you've created a meal plan, think about what you can prepare in advance based on this plan.

When it comes to food prep, I prefer preparing food components in advance versus entire meals. The beauty of preparing components (such as chopped veggies, chopped fruit, a grain, shredded meat, eggs, granola, a particular main, etc.) is the versatility this offers you throughout the week.

For example, cut fruit can function not only for lunch prep but also snack and breakfast prep. Cut veggies can be used as a snack, lunch component, and served in a variety of ways for dinner (to make soup, salad, roasted, etc.). A dip or dressing, like ranch dip, can be served alongside veggies and also used as a salad dressing. Beans can be served one night in burrito bowls, or on top of nachos, and then used to make a bean and rice main in the lunchbox.

Prepped food components come together to create easy, almost-effortless lunches and may also be used to reduce the amount of time it takes you to prepare other meals. When you think about how your meals flow together (as we talked about in the meal plan section), you can maximize your food prep time and effort by stretching various components across multiple meals. This is what we call "working smarter, not harder."



## How to Determine What You'll Prep

In order to be intentional about food prep, you're going to need two things: *your calendar and a meal plan*. Take a look at your calendar and meal plan, and ask yourself, "What's the most important food to prep based on my schedule? What's going to simplify our life this week? What's going to make the biggest impact?" Think about what stressors you can eliminate with some intentional preparation.

Sure, you could "do it all," but for most of us that's just impractical. Instead, narrow your focus down to just a few foods: between 1-5 food components. (That said, some weeks you may want to prep more food than other weeks due to a busy season of life or having more time to dedicate to food prep.)

By focusing on just a few foods, you'll still have to cook and build meals throughout the week, but you'll reduce the overall amount of time you spend in the kitchen. Even just preparing one food, like making muffins, can make a significant impact on simplifying the lunchbox and breakfast.

## How to Prep Food in Advance

Once you've determined what you'll prep in advance (the actual food based on your meal plan), ask yourself, "How will I make this happen?"

By intentionally thinking about how you'll prep food in advance, you're giving yourself an action plan. You're





saying, “Here’s my plan, here’s what I’m going to prepare in advance, and here’s how I’m going to make it happen.”

Food prep isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach. There are 3 ways to approach preparing food in advance. The approach you take may change with the seasons or even from week to week. Or, you may choose to use a mix of all three approaches throughout the week.

### Approach 1: All at Once

This is what most of us think about when it comes to food prep. This approach looks like spending a few hours in the kitchen, getting food ready for the week to come.

This may look like spending Sunday afternoon peeling carrots, washing and cutting fruit, cooking a whole chicken, and making hummus. All of these components may be used to build lunches along with other meals.

This approach can feel overwhelming, but can also be incredibly satisfying.



### Approach 2: A Little at a Time

Instead of preparing food during one large block of time, with this approach, you divide up your food prep plan into smaller chunks: a little at a time over the course of a few days.

This may look like making muffins Sunday night to serve with breakfast and/or in the lunchbox over the next few days, prepping another food while you make dinner on Monday night (cutting carrots or making ranch dip),







and then later in the week preparing a whole chicken to make sandwiches for lunch and soup for a future dinner.

Or, maybe this looks like preparing food on Sunday for an hour and then again on Wednesday evening for an hour, dividing up an “All at Once” prep into smaller chunks of time.

With this approach, it’s important that you map out when you plan to prep and stick to this plan.

### Approach 3: Cook Once, Eat Twice

This approach is a strategic and intentional way of thinking about leftovers. This looks like intentionally making extra of whatever you’re cooking or preparing so you have enough food to use again in the future. This future could be tomorrow, in a few days, or in the long-term future (which means you’ll freeze the extra food for safe keeping).

Using this approach allows you to strategically think about how your meals flow together, meaning what you make for dinner one night may intentionally be doubled and then used again for lunch or a future dinner.

For example, if you plan to make muffins for a weekend breakfast, intentionally double the amount made, storing the extras in the freezer for a future breakfast and lunch.

For many of us, spending an extra few hours in the kitchen isn’t reasonable right now, but preparing extra of a meal we already plan to make is 100% doable.



# SET YOURSELF UP FOR FOOD PREP SUCCESS



Now that we've talked about establishing a food prep routine, let's talk about some food prep "rules."

The following "rules" are small ways to maximize your food prep time, so you can spend your time wisely and efficiently.

## 1. Eliminate Distractions

Now, I'm not talking about children here. If your children can help, encourage them to do so. For example, children can wash and/or cut veggies and fruit, make a dip, and mix muffin batter. The degree to which your child can help with food prep is based on their age and attention span.



The distraction I'm specifically referring to is social media. You know, checking Facebook or Instagram every five minutes. It may not seem like a distraction, but doing this can make your short food prep session last longer than it should.



When it's time to prep food, put your phone down and crank up the music or a podcast. Focus on the task at hand so you can work quickly and efficiently.

## 2. Write down your prep plan.

I find that it's helpful to make a note of what I'm going to prep on the bottom of my meal plan or on a Post-It note. This note keeps me focused during prep time. I've also found that a written prep plan helps me establish a good flow for prepping: what to make first, second, and last.

On the lunch meal plan template (found on page 18), I've created a space for you to write down your prep plan. I've also provided ideas for what you can prep in advance, starting on page 37. You'll find recipes for many of the foods mentioned in the recipe book.

## 3. Double check your ingredients.

Always make sure you have all the ingredients needed before you begin preparing food. Also, make sure you've defrosted any meat you'll need.

## 4. Start with a clean kitchen, fridge, and food prep containers.

There's nothing more discouraging than cooking and preparing food and then spending an additional hour cleaning up the mess. To minimize the mess, clean your kitchen before a food prep session. Clean any dishes sitting in the sink. Clear any clutter from the counter tops. A clean kitchen will give you more room to work, keep you organized, and minimize the after-prep mess.







Before you create a plan and prep food, clean out your fridge. Toss or compost anything that's spoiled, and wash your food prep storage containers.

### 5. Keep your next meal simple.

If you're going to do an "all at once" food prep session, this rule is important to consider.

It's easy to spend time prepping for the week to come only to realize that you're too tired to actually make your next meal. I've made this mistake more times than I'd like to admit.



To fix this mistake, keep your next meal simple. Make a soup in the Instant Pot (which can also serve as prep since leftovers are inevitable), quesadillas (another way to cook once, eat twice), a cooked whole chicken and roasted veggies (you can use the leftovers from this meal as lunch prep), a meat and cheese and veggie board, or hamburgers on the grill.

### 6. Take advantage of prepared food from the store.

Today, stores and markets offer ready-made, real-food convenience options, such as cut fresh fruit, cut veggies, cut cheese cubes, mayo, rotisserie chicken, tortillas, pizza dough, cooked rice or quinoa (freezer section), applesauce, crackers, fruit leather, granola bars, hummus, and guacamole.



You don't have to make everything from scratch, especially if you're limited on time. Take advantage of these ready-made options to reduce your prep time.



There are seasons for everything, so you may find that you need to rely on these options during busier seasons of the school year.

When purchasing packaged food, always read the ingredient list. Ingredients should be real, meaning made with simple ingredients you would use in your own kitchen. For cut fruits and veggies, reach for the options in the produce department, which are prepared by the store, versus canned options. See page 34 for my favorite convenience options.



## 7. Use appliances to maximize your time.

Use an Instant Pot or slow cooker to cook various foods so you don't have to spend so much hands-on time in the kitchen. The Instant Pot is my absolute favorite tool for simplifying food prep. You'll find several Instant Pot recipes in the recipe book that accompanies this kit. Use these recipes to simplify your life and reduce your hands-on food prep time. A few of my favorite go-to Instant Pot recipes for food prep are beans, a whole chicken, any soup, and eggs.



## 8. Use prep containers to store food components and keep ingredients fresh.

If you're going to prep food in advance or purchase fresh ingredients in advance (this is also considered "prep"), you're going to need containers to store the food. On the next few pages, you'll find an explanation of my favorite food-prep containers. These containers are versatile, so most of them work for storing prepared food and fresh ingredients.