

NUTRITION RESOURCES | FALL

Back-to-Routine Meal Prep

When school starts back up, routines shift for the whole house, not just the kids. A little planning on the front end makes the busiest mornings and evenings much easier to get through.

WEEKEND PREP CHECKLIST

Shopping list add-ons

- 1 whole chicken (4–5 lbs), or 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- 2 lbs assorted fall vegetables — carrots, sweet potatoes, Brussels sprouts
- 1 bag rice, quinoa, or farro
- 1 dozen eggs
- Tortillas or wraps
- Broth or stock (or plan to make your own from the chicken carcass)
- Oats, milk, and yogurt for grab-and-go breakfasts
- Chili staples — canned beans, canned tomatoes, ground turkey or extra beans

Saturday or Sunday prep steps

- Roast the chicken and vegetables together (recipe below) — plan for it to be Sunday's dinner, with plenty left over.
- While the oven's going, cook a batch of grain on the stovetop.
- Hard-boil a dozen eggs, or make a tray of egg muffin cups.
- Portion overnight oats into jars for the week.
- After dinner, shred the leftover chicken and store it in the fridge. Save the carcass in the freezer if you want to make stock for Wednesday's soup.

STRATEGIES WORTH BUILDING INTO YOUR WEEK

Strategy	Why It Helps	Easy Ways to Start
Batch Cooking	One prep session covers several meals during the week	Cook a big pot of grains, roasted vegetables, or a protein on the weekend
Freezer Staples	Cuts down on decision fatigue on the busiest nights	Freeze portioned soups, burritos, or pre-cooked chicken
Overlapping Lunches	One prep covers lunch for both you and your kids	Pack extra of your kid's lunch ingredients for your own lunch
Grab-and-Go Breakfasts	Mornings are often the tightest time of day	Overnight oats, egg muffin cups, or yogurt parfaits made ahead
A Rotating Menu	Cuts down on the daily “what's for dinner” decision	Pick 4–5 dinners and rotate through them each week

EASY WAYS TO MAKE IT STICK

- Prep on the same day each week — Sunday works well for many households — so it becomes routine rather than an extra decision.
- Keep a running grocery list on the fridge or phone so nothing gets missed on a busy week.
- Cook once, eat twice: make Sunday's dinner bigger than you need, and build the week's lunches and dinners around the leftovers.
- Use the same style of containers for adults and kids — it makes packing lunches faster for everyone.
- Keep a stash of frozen fruit and vegetables on hand to fill gaps when fresh produce runs low mid-week.

A SAMPLE WEEK BUILT AROUND SUNDAY'S DINNER

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Sunday	Prep Day	Cook a grain, roast a tray of vegetables, and portion out overnight oats for the week	Big-Batch Roast Chicken & Fall Vegetables (see recipe) — plan for leftovers
Monday	Overnight oats	Chicken & grain bowl, using Sunday's leftovers (pack extra for your kid's lunch too)	Chicken tacos, using more of Sunday's chicken
Tuesday	Yogurt parfait	Taco filling in a wrap with the extra from Monday	Stir-fry using frozen vegetables and hard-boiled eggs or beans
Wednesday	Egg muffin cups	Leftover chicken soup, using the last of Sunday's chicken (see recipe)	Sheet-pan salmon and roasted sweet potato
Thursday	Overnight oats	Chicken & grain bowl remix with whatever's left	Chili — double the batch
Friday	Yogurt parfait	Chili leftovers from Thursday	Breakfast-for-dinner or a simple pantry night

RECIPES

Sunday Big-Batch Roast Chicken & Fall Vegetables

Serves 6, with planned leftovers for the week

Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken (4–5 lbs), or 8 bone-in chicken thighs
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp salt, 1 tsp pepper, 1 tsp garlic powder, 1 tsp paprika
- 4 carrots, 2 sweet potatoes, 1 lb Brussels sprouts — cut into chunks

Steps

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Toss the vegetables with 1 tbsp oil and half the seasoning; spread on a sheet pan.
3. Rub the chicken with the remaining oil and seasoning; place on the pan (or a second pan, if using a whole chicken).
4. Roast 45–60 minutes for a whole chicken, or 35–40 minutes for thighs, until the chicken reaches 165°F.
5. Rest 10 minutes, then carve. Serve dinner, and set aside at least half the chicken and a portion of the vegetables for the week ahead.

Weeknight Chicken & Grain Bowl

Used Monday and Thursday — a flexible formula, not a fixed recipe

Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked grain (from Sunday's batch)
- Shredded leftover chicken
- Roasted vegetables from Sunday, or a quick sauté
- Olive oil and lemon, or a spoonful of yogurt-based dressing

Steps

1. Warm the grain, chicken, and vegetables together, or serve cold as a bowl.
2. Dress with olive oil and lemon, or a yogurt-based sauce, and season to taste.

Leftover Chicken Soup

Used Wednesday — a good way to stretch the last of the chicken

Ingredients

- Chicken carcass (for stock) or 4 cups broth
- Remaining shredded chicken
- 2 carrots and 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 cup cooked grain, from Sunday's batch
- Salt, pepper, and a bay leaf

Steps

1. If making stock, simmer the carcass in water for about an hour, then strain.
2. Add the chicken, carrots, and celery to the broth and simmer 20 minutes, until the vegetables are tender.
3. Stir in the cooked grain, season to taste, and remove the bay leaf before serving.

A NOTE ON REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Meal prep doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. Even prepping one component — just a grain, a protein, or a batch of chopped vegetables — saves real time during the week. Start with one strategy from the list above rather than trying to do all of them at once.

SOURCES

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. "Leftovers and Food Safety." fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/leftovers-and-food-safety

USDA. "MyPlate: Healthy Eating on a Budget." myplate.gov

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