





**A Little Taste of Home**  
**Comfort Food for the Next Chapter**  
By Amy Maryon

## Note from Amy

This little cookbook was written from a momma's heart—with love for my kids and for anyone stepping into a new season of life where they're learning how to cook for themselves.

Years ago, I wrote a family-sized cookbook filled with all the meals we used to make together. We cooked in big batches back then, with full ovens and full tables. But life changes—and so does the way we cook. Now we find ourselves making smaller portions, fewer processed foods, and choosing to make more things from scratch with what we already have on hand.

So, this book is different. Most of the recipes are designed for two people—perfect for one person with leftovers or for sharing a simple meal with someone else. You'll find breakfast, lunch, dinner, and now even desserts, all made with love and a little bit of that home flavor we grew up with.

I also added a “Kitchen Basics” section—because sometimes we've just never been shown how to do certain things. From how to cook rice or boil an egg, to how to tell if meat is done, it's all there in case you need a gentle reminder or a place to start. And there's a whole section on what to do with leftovers—because we know how easy it is to let things go to waste when we don't know what to make next.

This book is for the next chapter, for the next group of kids growing up, and for anyone who's ready to step into their own kitchen and feel confident. I hope these pages bring you comfort, courage, and that little feeling of home—no matter where you are.

Love,

*Mom (Amy)*

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# Avocado Toast with Egg

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 2 slices hearty bread
- 1 ripe avocado
- 2 eggs (fried, scrambled, or boiled)
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: red pepper flakes, lemon juice, or everything bagel seasoning

## Directions

1. Toast the bread.
2. Mash the avocado and season with salt and pepper (add lemon if using).
3. Spread avocado on toast.
4. Top each slice with a cooked egg.
5. Sprinkle with extra seasoning if desired.

## Prep Tips

- Hard-boiled eggs can be made ahead for quick assembly.
  - Add sliced tomato or spinach for extra freshness.
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# Bagel with Cream Cheese and Salami

**Serves 2**

*For 4 servings, double the ingredients*

## Ingredients

- 2 bagels
- 4 tablespoons cream cheese
- 4–6 slices salami

## Directions

1. Toast the bagels.
2. Spread each half with cream cheese.
3. Add 2–3 slices of salami per sandwich.
4. Enjoy warm or cold.

## Notes

This is a staple breakfast in our home. I realized not many people have ever had this combination, but it's been a favorite of mine since childhood. We would eat this as a quick breakfast when camping with my Aunt Sandy.

You can make the sandwiches ahead of time and place them back in the bag to freeze. Thaw completely, then bake in the air fryer to crisp them up again.

Add a sprinkle of everything bagel seasoning on the cream cheese for extra flavor.



# Baked Brunch Sandwiches

**Serves 2 (makes 2 sandwiches)**

*For 4 servings: double ingredients and use a larger baking dish.*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 tablespoon mustard
- 4 slices bread
- 2 slices fully cooked ham
- 2 slices Swiss or provolone cheese
- 2–3 thin tomato slices
- 1 tablespoon softened butter
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Directions

1. Spread mustard on one side of 2 slices of bread.
2. Layer ham, cheese, and tomato slices over mustard.
3. Top with the remaining bread slices, buttered on top.
4. Cut each sandwich in half and arrange in a small greased baking dish (an 8x8 works well).
5. Beat eggs and milk in a bowl. Add a pinch of salt and pepper.
6. Pour egg mixture over the sandwiches.
7. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight.
8. In the morning, uncover and bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes or until golden and the cheese is melted.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- You can assemble and freeze these sandwiches (unbaked). Thaw overnight in the fridge before baking.
- Prepare multiple sandwiches at once and store them wrapped for easy weekday breakfasts.

## Leftovers

- Store baked sandwiches in the fridge for up to 2 days. Reheat in a toaster oven or air fryer for best texture.
-

# Baked French Toast

**Serves 2**

*For 4 servings, double ingredients and use a larger dish.*

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 4 slices of bread
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup milk

## Directions

1. Melt butter in a small baking dish (about 8x8 size).
2. Stir in brown sugar and cinnamon until combined.
3. Layer 4 slices of bread, stacked slightly or overlapped, over the sugar mixture.
4. In a bowl, beat eggs and milk. Pour over the bread.
5. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
6. In the morning, uncover and bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes until golden and set.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- This is best fresh, but you can prep multiple pans and freeze before baking. Thaw in fridge overnight before baking.
- You can also bake, slice, and freeze in individual portions to reheat later.

## Leftovers

- Reheat in a skillet, toaster oven, or microwave. Serve with fruit, syrup, or whipped cream.

# Basic Granola (Simplified Version)

**Yields about 2 cups**

*For larger batches, double or triple.*

## Ingredients

- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts (pecans, walnuts, or cashews)
- 2 tablespoons honey or pancake syrup
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil or any mild oil
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: cinnamon or a splash of vanilla

## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 300°F.
2. In a bowl, combine oats and nuts.
3. In a small saucepan, warm oil and honey just until melted.
4. Pour over oat mixture and stir to coat.
5. Spread on a baking sheet and bake for 20–25 minutes, stirring once halfway through.
6. Let cool completely before storing.

## Notes

Use on yogurt, with milk, or by the handful.



# Biscuit, Egg, and Bacon Cups

**Serves 2 (makes 2–3 cups depending on biscuit size)**

*For 4 servings: use 4–6 biscuits and double the toppings.*

## Ingredients

- 2 refrigerator biscuits
- 2 eggs
- 2 slices cooked bacon, crumbled
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onions

## Directions

1. Spray muffin tins with nonstick spray.
2. Press one biscuit into each muffin tin, spreading to cover the bottom and sides.
3. Crack an egg into each biscuit cup.
4. Sprinkle with bacon, cheese, and green onions.
5. Bake at 400°F for 18–20 minutes, until eggs are set and tops are golden.
6. Optional: Place foil on a baking sheet underneath in case of overflow.

## Notes

You can scramble the eggs with a little milk instead of cracking them whole. Or, cut the biscuits into chunks and mix with eggs and toppings before adding to the cups.

Another option: wrap a slice of bacon around the inside of the muffin cup before adding ingredients.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- These freeze well once fully baked. Reheat in a toaster oven or microwave.
- Make a batch, freeze individually, and grab as needed for quick breakfasts.

# Breakfast Burrito

**Serves 2 (makes 2 burritos)**

*For 4: double everything.*

## Ingredients

- 2 medium tortillas
- 2 scrambled eggs
- 2 tablespoons crumbled bacon or sausage
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons canned cheddar cheese or American cheese
- Optional: diced onions, peppers, or hash browns

## Directions

1. Cook all ingredients separately.
2. In a bowl, mix eggs, meat, cheese, and any add-ins.
3. Spoon filling into tortillas and roll up tightly.

## Notes

Make these to fit your taste. Add cooked veggies, leftover meat, or beans. My kids liked extra cheese, so we often used canned cheddar as a binder.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- Lay burritos on a baking sheet and freeze until solid. Wrap in wax paper and store in freezer bags.
- To reheat: thaw overnight, then microwave for 1½–2 minutes or bake until crispy.
- Great for weekly batch cooking—just grab and go.



# Breakfast Haystack

**Serves 2**

*For 4: double all ingredients.*

## Ingredients

- 2 biscuits, baked and crumbled
- 1 cup cooked shredded hash browns
- 2 tablespoons crumbled sausage
- 2 tablespoons crumbled bacon
- 2 scrambled eggs
- 1/4 cup shredded cheese
- 1/3 cup sausage gravy (from mix, thinned slightly with extra water)

## Directions

1. Lay out each topping in small bowls or on a board.
2. Let everyone build their own haystack: biscuit base, hash browns, meats, eggs, cheese, then ladle on gravy.

## Notes

This is a fun and hearty breakfast that feels like comfort food. Perfect for slow weekends or brunch-style dinners.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- Make components ahead and store separately in the fridge.
- Biscuit dough, cooked sausage, and shredded cheese all freeze well.

# Breakfast Pizza

**Serves 2–3**

*For 4 or more, double ingredients and use a larger crust.*

## Ingredients

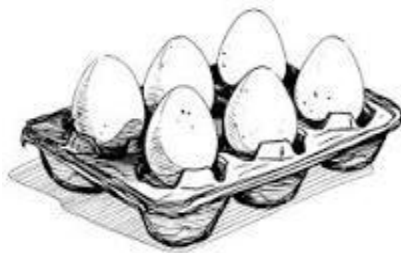
- 1 small crust (half a can crescent rolls, flatbread, or homemade dough)
- 1/4 to 1/3 cup prepared sausage gravy \* see recipe
- 2 scrambled eggs
- 1/4 cup toppings: diced ham, bacon, sausage, peppers, or onions
- 1/3 cup shredded cheese

## Directions

1. Pre-bake your crust on a small sheet or pan according to package or recipe.
2. Spread gravy across the crust.
3. Add scrambled eggs and toppings.
4. Sprinkle with cheese.
5. Bake at 350°F until heated through and cheese is melted (about 10–12 minutes).

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- Assemble completely and freeze before baking, or freeze leftover slices.
- Reheat in the oven or toaster oven.



# Breakfast Quesadillas

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 2 small tortillas
- 2 eggs, scrambled
- 1/4 cup shredded cheese
- Optional: cooked sausage or bacon bits, onions, or peppers
- Butter or oil for frying

## Directions

1. Scramble eggs and cook with any add-ins.
2. Lay tortilla in a skillet, add egg and cheese, then top with another tortilla or fold in half.
3. Cook over medium heat until golden, flipping once.
4. Slice and serve.

## Freezer Tip

Make ahead, cool, and freeze in halves. Reheat in a toaster oven or skillet.

# Buttermilk Pancakes

Serves 2 (makes about 6 pancakes)

## Ingredients

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon baking soda
- Pinch of salt
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon melted butter (plus more for the pan)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. In a bowl, whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
2. In another bowl, beat egg with buttermilk, melted butter, and vanilla.
3. Pour wet into dry and stir until just combined (a few lumps are okay).
4. Heat a greased skillet over medium heat. Pour  $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup batter per pancake.
5. Cook until bubbles form and edges look dry (about 2–3 min). Flip and cook another 1–2 min until golden.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- Make a double batch; cool completely and freeze separated by parchment. Reheat in toaster or oven.
- Prep dry ingredients in advance and store in a jar for quick pancake mix.

## Kitchen Note

*No buttermilk? Make your own: Add 1 tablespoon white vinegar or lemon juice to a measuring cup, then fill to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup with milk. Let sit 5 minutes.*

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# Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cups

**Makes about 6 muffin cups**

*For a bigger batch, double everything.*

## Ingredients

- 1 ripe banana, mashed
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup oats
- 1/4 cup mini chocolate chips

## Directions

1. Mix everything in a bowl.
2. Spoon into greased muffin tin (about 6 cups).
3. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes.

## Freezer & Meal Prep Tips

- These freeze beautifully. Just wrap individually and reheat in the microwave.
- Perfect for grab-and-go breakfasts or snacks.



# Chocolate Granola

**Yields about 2–3 cups**

*Original batch makes a lot—this is scaled down for small households.*

## Ingredients

- 2 cups oats
- 1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1/4 cup flax seeds
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts (pecans or almonds work great)
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1/4 cup coconut oil
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar or honey
- 2 tablespoons mini chocolate chips

## Directions

1. Melt coconut oil in a small pot. Stir in cocoa, maple syrup, and sugar. Remove from heat and add vanilla.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine oats, coconut, flax, and nuts.
3. Pour chocolate mixture over dry ingredients and stir well.
4. Spread on a lined baking sheet and bake at 325°F for 10–12 minutes.
5. Stir gently and bake another 10–12 minutes.
6. Let cool slightly, then stir in chocolate chips. Cool fully before storing.

## Notes

We used to make this once a month. It's a quick breakfast with milk or a great topping for yogurt or fruit.

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# Chocolate Peanut Butter Smoothie

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 1 cup milk (any kind works: dairy, almond, oat, etc.)
- 1 frozen banana
- 1 tablespoon chocolate syrup or cocoa powder + sweetener
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter

## Directions

Blend everything until smooth.

## Notes

We use frozen bananas instead of ice cream or ice cubes—it makes the shake cold and creamy. Feel free to use cocoa powder with a bit of sugar if you don't have syrup.



# Cinnamon Toast

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 2 slices bread
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

## Directions

1. Mix sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl.
2. Toast bread lightly.
3. Spread each slice with butter, then sprinkle with the cinnamon-sugar mixture.
4. Optional: place under broiler for 1–2 minutes to caramelize slightly.

## Notes

A simple treat that tastes like childhood. You can also prep the cinnamon-sugar mix ahead and keep it in a jar.



# Clean-Out-the-Fridge Breakfast Hash

Serves 2–3

## Ingredients

- 2 medium potatoes, diced
- 1–1½ cups cooked meat, chopped (sausage, ham, bacon, ground beef, etc.)
- 4 eggs, whisked
- 1 tablespoon oil or butter
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional toppings: shredded cheese, salsa, ketchup, mustard

## Directions

1. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat.
2. Add diced potatoes and cook until browned and tender, about 10–12 minutes. Stir occasionally.
3. Add in the cooked meat and stir to combine. Heat through.
4. Pour whisked eggs over the mixture. Stir gently until eggs are fully cooked and scrambled into the hash.
5. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Serve warm with your choice of toppings.

## Topping Ideas

- Salsa for a Tex-Mex twist
- Ketchup or mustard for a diner-style flavor
- Cheese melted on top while still hot

## Make-Ahead Tip

Chop potatoes and meat the night before to make this faster in the morning.

This was made famous from Aunt Crystal and her Train Wreck for Breakfast.

# Classic Buttermilk Waffles

**Serves 2 (makes about 2–3 waffles depending on your waffle iron)**

*Double for 4 servings.*

## Ingredients

- 2/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- Pinch of salt
- 3/4 cup buttermilk\*
- 1 egg, separated
- 1 1/2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. Preheat your waffle iron.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a second bowl, whisk together the egg yolk, buttermilk, melted butter, and vanilla.
4. In a third bowl, beat the egg white until soft peaks form (this makes the waffles fluffy).
5. Combine wet and dry ingredients just until mixed. Fold in the egg white gently.
6. Pour batter into preheated waffle iron and cook according to the machine's directions, usually 4–6 minutes, until golden and crisp.

## Serve with:

Butter and syrup, fruit and whipped cream, or nut butter and banana slices.

## Meal Prep & Freezer Tips

- Cook extra waffles and freeze them. Reheat in a toaster or oven.
- Waffles can be cut into strips and frozen for homemade waffle sticks.

## Kitchen Note

*No buttermilk? Make your own: Add 1 tablespoon white vinegar or lemon juice to a measuring cup, then fill to 3/4 cup with milk. Let sit 5 minutes.*

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# Creamy Grits for Two

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 1/2 cup quick-cooking grits
- 2 cups water (or use part milk for creamier texture)
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Optional: 1/4 cup shredded cheese, crumbled bacon, green onions

## Directions

1. Bring water (or water/milk mixture) and salt to a boil in a small saucepan.
2. Slowly stir in the grits. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring often, for 5–7 minutes until thickened.
3. Remove from heat and stir in butter.
4. Add cheese, bacon, or green onions if desired. Serve warm.

## Add-In Ideas

- **Cheesy Grits:** Stir in 1/4 cup cheddar or pepper jack while still hot.
- **Bacon Grits:** Top with crispy bacon bits or stir them in for smoky flavor.
- **Savory Grits Bowl:** Add a fried egg on top and serve with a side of toast.

## Quick Tip: Crispy Bacon Bits in the Microwave

Chop up a slice or two of raw bacon and place the pieces on a paper towel-lined plate. Cover with another paper towel and microwave for 3–4 minutes until crispy. Let cool slightly—they'll crisp up even more as they sit.

# Egg Cups

**Makes about 4 egg cups (Serves 2)**

*For 4: use 6–8 eggs and double fillings.*

## Ingredients

- 4 eggs
- 1/4 cup chopped veggies (spinach, tomatoes, peppers, etc.)
- 2 tablespoons cooked bacon, sausage, or ham
- 2 tablespoons shredded or crumbled cheese (feta or cheddar)
- Salt and pepper

## Directions

1. If using raw veggies or meat, lightly sauté before adding.
2. Scramble eggs in a bowl. Stir in fillings.
3. Spray muffin tin with nonstick spray or use silicone liners.
4. Pour mixture into 4 cups, about 3/4 full.
5. Bake at 350°F for 20 minutes, or until eggs are set.

## Notes

Store in the fridge for up to 4 days. Reheat in microwave or toaster oven.

## Freezer Tips

Freeze fully cooked cups and reheat for busy mornings.

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# Fruit and Nut Oatmeal

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 1 cup old-fashioned oats
- 2 cups water or milk
- 1/2 apple or banana, chopped
- 2 tablespoons raisins or dried fruit
- 2 tablespoons chopped nuts
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- Optional: honey or maple syrup

## Directions

1. In a small pot, combine oats, liquid, fruit, and cinnamon.
2. Bring to a simmer and cook 5–8 minutes, stirring often.
3. Remove from heat and stir in nuts and sweetener if using.

## Prep Tip

Chop fruit ahead and store in fridge or freezer.



# Homemade Bagels (Small Batch)

**Makes 4 bagels**

*Double for 8 bagels.*

## Ingredients

- 1¾ cups bread flour\*
- 1 teaspoon instant yeast
- ¾ tablespoon sugar
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ⅔ cup plus 1 tablespoon warm water (about 110°F)
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\*You can use all-purpose flour, but bread flour makes them chewier and more like a classic bakery bagel.

## Directions

### 1. **Make the Dough**

In a large bowl, combine flour, yeast, sugar, and salt. Add warm water and stir until a rough dough forms.

Knead by hand or with a mixer for 8–10 minutes, until the dough is smooth and elastic.

Cover and let rise in a warm place for about 1 to 1½ hours, or until doubled in size.

### 2. **Shape the Bagels**

Punch down the dough and divide it into 4 equal pieces.

Roll each piece into a ball, then poke your finger through the center and gently stretch to form a ring shape.

Place shaped bagels on a parchment-lined tray, cover lightly, and let rest 15–20 minutes.

### 3. **Boil the Bagels**

Preheat oven to 425°F.

Bring a large pot of water to a gentle boil. Stir in **1 tablespoon sugar** to the water.

Carefully drop bagels into the water, 1–2 at a time, and boil for **30 seconds per side**.

(Boiling gives them that signature chewy crust and helps keep their shape during baking.)

### 4. **Add Toppings & Bake**

Return boiled bagels to the parchment-lined tray.

Brush with a beaten egg for a glossy finish.

Sprinkle with everything bagel seasoning, sesame seeds, poppy seeds, or coarse salt.

Bake for 20–22 minutes, until golden brown.

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# Homemade Sausage Gravy

**Serves 2–3 generously**

*Double or triple for a large family batch or freezer prep*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 pound ground breakfast sausage
- 2 tablespoons reserved sausage grease or butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups milk (whole or 2% preferred)
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Directions

1. In a skillet, cook the sausage over medium heat until browned and crumbled.
2. Scoop the sausage out and set aside, leaving about 2 tablespoons of the grease in the pan. If you don't have enough grease, add a little butter.
3. Sprinkle the flour into the hot grease and stir well, cooking for about 1 minute to remove the raw flour taste.
4. Slowly pour in the milk while whisking constantly to avoid lumps.
5. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until thickened (about 5 minutes).
6. Add the sausage back in and season with salt and plenty of black pepper. Simmer a couple more minutes and serve warm over biscuits, toast, or even potatoes.

## Freezer & Make-Ahead Tips

- You can cook a large batch of sausage and freeze it in small portions. Save the grease too—it freezes well in small jars or containers and can be reheated to make a fresh pan of gravy.
- Gravy itself can also be frozen. Let it cool, portion into freezer containers, and reheat slowly with a splash of milk.

## Serving Ideas

- Over homemade or refrigerated biscuits
- Stuffed into biscuit pockets (see previous recipe)
- Served alongside eggs or grits

# Make-Ahead Breakfast Sandwiches

**Yields 6 sandwiches**

*Customize, freeze, and reheat as needed*

## Bread Options

- English muffins
- Biscuits (homemade or store-bought)
- Croissants
- Bagels

## Filling Options

- Sliced cheese (cheddar, American, or pepper jack)
- Cooked bacon
- Sausage patties
- Ham slices
- Oven-baked eggs (see below)

## Oven-Baked Eggs (Easy for a Batch)

### Ingredients

- 10–12 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
  2. Grease a rimmed 9x13-inch baking dish well or line with parchment.
  3. Whisk eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Pour into the pan.
  4. Bake for 18–22 minutes or until eggs are set in the center.
  5. Let cool, then cut into 6 squares—perfectly sized for sandwiches.
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## Assembly Instructions

1. Split your bread (toast lightly if desired).
2. Layer with:
  - a. 1 square of baked egg
  - b. 1 slice of cheese
  - c. 1 cooked meat option (or skip for vegetarian)
3. Place the top on and press gently.

## To Store

- Wrap each sandwich in parchment or foil, then place in a freezer-safe bag or container.
- Refrigerate for up to 4 days or freeze for up to 2 months.

## To Reheat

### From fridge:

- Microwave 30–45 seconds or warm in toaster oven.

### From frozen:

- Unwrap and microwave for 1½–2 minutes (flip halfway), or
- Wrap in foil and bake at 350°F for 20–25 minutes.

# Microwave Mug Scrambles

Serves 2 (make in 2 mugs)

## Ingredients

- 2 eggs per mug
- 1 tablespoon milk per mug
- Pinch of salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon shredded cheese
- Optional: tiny bits of cooked meat or veggies

## Directions

1. Spray mugs with nonstick spray.
2. Whisk eggs and milk in each mug. Add fillings.
3. Microwave for 1 minute, stir, then microwave 30–60 seconds more until done.
4. Let sit for 1 minute before eating.

## Tips

Use wide, microwave-safe mugs. Avoid overcooking—they'll keep cooking after microwaving.



## Mini Frittatas (Muffin Style)

Makes 4 mini frittatas (Serves 2)

### Ingredients

- 4 eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1/4 cup diced veggies (spinach, tomato, onion, etc.)
- 2 tablespoons cooked bacon or sausage
- 1/4 cup shredded cheese
- Salt and pepper

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Spray 4 muffin cups with nonstick spray.
3. Whisk eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Stir in veggies, meat, and cheese.
4. Pour into muffin cups.
5. Bake for 20–22 minutes or until eggs are set.

### Freezer Tip

Let cool, then freeze in bags. Reheat one at a time for a fast breakfast.

# Omelets

## Serves 2

*Use about 2–3 eggs per omelet*

## Ingredients

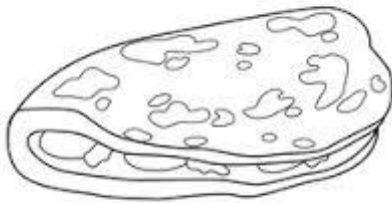
- 4–6 eggs
- 1/4 cup cooked fillings (onions, peppers, mushrooms, meat, hashbrowns)
- 1/4 cup shredded cheese
- Salt and pepper
- Butter for pan

## Directions

1. Heat a nonstick skillet with a bit of butter.
2. Beat eggs in a bowl and pour into the hot pan.
3. Let cook for 2–3 minutes until edges set.
4. Flip or broil briefly to finish the top.
5. Add fillings on one side, fold over, and serve.

## Tips

Make a few at a time and keep warm in the oven until ready to serve.



# Overnight Oats

Serves 2 (in jars or containers)

## Ingredients

- 1 cup old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup milk (any kind)
- 2 tablespoons plain or flavored yogurt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon chia seeds (optional)
- 1/2 cup fruit (fresh or frozen)
- Dash of cinnamon or vanilla
- Optional sweetener: honey or maple syrup

## Directions

1. Mix all ingredients in 2 small jars or containers.
2. Cover and refrigerate overnight (or at least 4 hours).
3. Stir and eat cold, or warm in the microwave.

## Meal Prep Tip

Make several jars at once for the week. They'll keep in the fridge up to 4 days.

# Peanut Butter Banana Wraps

Serves 2

## Ingredients

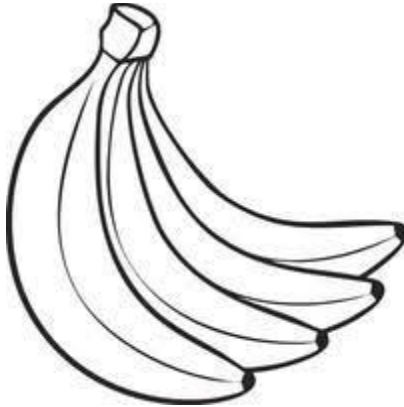
- 2 small or medium tortillas
- 1 banana, sliced
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- Optional: sprinkle of cinnamon or chocolate chips

## Directions

1. Spread 1 tablespoon of peanut butter on each tortilla.
2. Lay banana slices down the middle.
3. Add optional toppings.
4. Roll up like a burrito and slice in half if desired.

## Freezer Tip

Wrap tightly in foil or plastic wrap and freeze. Thaw in fridge or warm slightly before eating.



# Peanut Butter Toast

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 2 slices whole grain or white bread
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- Optional toppings: banana slices, honey drizzle, cinnamon, chia seeds, or raisins

## Directions

1. Toast bread.
2. Spread with peanut butter.
3. Add your favorite toppings. Eat warm or pack for later.

## Tips

- For a sweet version, add sliced apples and a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar.
- For protein-packed mornings, top with seeds or drizzle with a little honey.



# Popovers

## Classic Popovers for Two

Makes 3–4 popovers

*Original makes 6; halved here for smaller households.*

## Ingredients

- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup lukewarm milk (whole milk preferred)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup all-purpose flour
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons melted butter, cooled slightly
- Butter or oil for greasing

## Directions

1. Prep the Pan & Oven  
Preheat your oven to 450°F, placing the rack in the lower third. Grease a 4- to 6-cup popover pan or muffin tin thoroughly (including the rim).  
*Tip:* A hot pan helps the batter rise dramatically
2. Blend the Batter  
In a blender or bowl, blend together eggs, milk, and salt until frothy. Add flour and blend/stir until smooth, then whisk in melted butter
3. Rest the Batter  
Let batter sit for 15 minutes while the oven finishes preheating. This resting period helps create taller, airy popovers
4. Bake  
Pour batter into the hot, greased cups, filling nearly to the top. Bake 20 minutes without opening the door. Then reduce heat to 350°F and bake another 10–12 minutes, until deep golden and well-risen
5. Release Steam & Serve  
Immediately remove from oven. Pierce each popover with a sharp knife to release steam—this ensures a crisp shell. Serve warm with butter, jam, or honey.

## Why It Works

- Room-temperature eggs and warm milk trap air and steam inside the structure, causing them to puff up
  - High initial heat helps them rise; lowering the temperature sets their structure without burning .
  - The tall, narrow cups of a popover pan trap steam better than flat muffin tins
-

# Sausage Balls (with Homemade Baking Mix)

Makes about 12–14 small balls (Serves 2–3)

*For more, double ingredients.*

## **Homemade Baking Mix (for this recipe)**

- 1 cup flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter, cut in

Mix until crumbly.

## **Main Ingredients**

- 8 oz ground sausage
- 4 oz cream cheese
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- Homemade baking mix (above)

## **Directions**

1. In a bowl, mix sausage and cream cheese until smooth.
2. Add shredded cheese.
3. Add baking mix and stir until combined.
4. Roll into small balls and place on baking sheet.
5. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes or until golden and cooked through.

## **Notes**

Great with sausage gravy for dipping or as a grab-and-go protein bite. Freeze raw or cooked. Reheat from frozen in oven or air fryer.

# Smoothie Packs (Freezer Ready)

Makes 4 smoothie packs

## Base Ingredients (per pack)

- 1 banana (sliced and frozen)
- 1/2 cup frozen fruit (berries, mango, pineapple, etc.)
- 1 handful spinach or kale (optional)
- Optional add-ins: 1 tablespoon peanut butter, 1 tablespoon oats, 1/2 teaspoon chia or flax seeds

## Directions

1. Place all ingredients into a small freezer bag or container. Label with flavor (ex: "Banana Berry Spinach").
2. To use: dump contents into blender. Add 3/4 to 1 cup milk (any kind) or yogurt and blend until smooth.

## Tips

- Prep several at once.
- Rotate flavors: banana-strawberry, pineapple-mango, blueberry-spinach, etc.



# Strawberry Yogurt Parfaits with Granola

**Makes 2 servings**

*Easily doubled or prepped in jars for the week*

## Ingredients

- 1 cup plain non-fat yogurt (store-bought in bulk)
- 1 cup fresh or frozen strawberries
- 1–2 tablespoons sugar (adjust to taste)
- 1/2 cup granola (homemade or store-bought)

## Directions

### 1. **Make the Strawberry Sauce**

In a small saucepan, combine strawberries and sugar.

Cook over medium heat for 5–7 minutes, stirring often, until the berries break down and form a thick sauce. Mash lightly with a fork or blend if you want it smooth.

Let cool before assembling.

### 2. **Assemble the Parfaits**

In two jars or cups, layer as follows:

- a. A spoonful of yogurt
- b. A spoonful of strawberry sauce
- c. A sprinkle of granola

Repeat layers until jars are filled. Finish with a little extra granola on top.

3. Serve right away for crunch or let sit a few minutes so the granola softens slightly—some folks prefer it that way!

## Make-Ahead Tips

- Store assembled parfaits (without granola) in the fridge for up to 3 days. Add granola just before eating.
- Make a big batch of strawberry sauce and store in a jar in the fridge for the week—it's also great on pancakes or toast.

## Optional Add-Ins

- A drizzle of honey or maple syrup over the yogurt if you like it sweeter
- A spoonful of peanut butter or chia seeds
- Swap strawberries for blueberries, peaches, or a mix of berries

# Stuffed Breakfast Biscuits

**Makes 2 stuffed biscuits (Serves 2)**

*Easily double or triple for meal prep or a crowd*

## Ingredients

- 4 refrigerated biscuit rounds (from 1 can)
- 1/4 cup sausage gravy (homemade or store-bought)
- **Filling Option 1:**
  - 2 tablespoons cooked crumbled sausage
- **Filling Option 2:**
  - 1 scrambled egg
  - 1 tablespoon cooked bacon bits
  - 2 tablespoons shredded cheese
  - 1–2 tablespoons sausage gravy
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted (optional, for brushing)

## Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F (or air fryer to 350°F).
2. Separate 4 biscuits into 2 pairs. Gently flatten each piece with your hands.
3. Place one flattened biscuit on a parchment-lined baking sheet or air fryer tray.
4. Spoon your chosen filling into the center:
  - a. **Option 1:** Gravy + sausage
  - b. **Option 2:** Scrambled egg + bacon bits + cheese + a spoonful of gravy
5. Top with the second biscuit round and seal the edges by pinching them tightly.
6. Brush the tops with melted butter if desired.
7. **To Bake:**
  - Bake at 375°F for 13–15 minutes, until golden and puffed.**To Air Fry:**
  - Air fry at 350°F for 8–10 minutes, until golden brown and cooked through.

## Freezer Tip

Once baked, let them cool completely. Wrap individually in foil or parchment and store in a freezer-safe bag. To reheat, pop in the toaster oven or air fryer until warmed through—no thawing needed.

---

# Toad in a Hole (Egg-in-a-Hole)

Serves 2

## Ingredients

- 2 slices bread (thick-sliced works best)
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Salt and pepper

## Directions

1. Use a small glass or biscuit cutter to cut a hole in the center of each bread slice.
2. Heat butter in a skillet over medium heat.
3. Place bread slices in the pan and crack an egg into each hole.
4. Cook for 2–3 minutes until bottom is set. Flip gently and cook another 1–2 minutes to desired doneness.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with fruit or a side of bacon.

## Optional

Toast the cut-out center piece in the pan too—it's great for dipping in the yolk!

Whether you're rushing out the door or settling in for a slow morning, having a few basics on hand can make breakfast quick, comforting, and satisfying. Here are a few things I always try to keep stocked, along with some simple tips for prepping ahead.

## **Breakfast Basics to Keep on Hand**

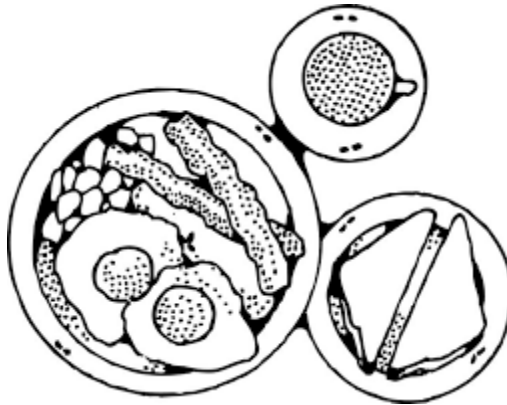
These staples make it easy to whip up something filling without much effort:

- **Eggs** – Scrambled, fried, boiled, baked into cups—eggs are cheap, versatile, and full of protein.
  - **Butter or Oil** – For toasting, frying, or spreading.
  - **Milk or Milk Alternative** – Use in cooking, baking, smoothies, or coffee.
  - **Cheese** – Shredded or sliced, it's perfect for omelets, quesadillas, or toast.
  - **Cooked Bacon or Sausage** – Make ahead and keep in the fridge or freezer. Chop into bits for eggs, grits, or sandwiches.
  - **Tortillas or Bread** – Great for breakfast burritos, toast, French toast, or wraps.
  - **Oats** – Use for oatmeal, overnight oats, muffins, or granola.
  - **Bananas and Berries** – Eat fresh or freeze for smoothies and baking.
  - **Peanut Butter** – Quick protein for toast, smoothies, or wraps.
  - **Cinnamon and Sugar** – For sweet toast, oatmeal, or baked goods.
  - **Everything Bagel Seasoning** – Sprinkle on eggs, avocado toast, or bagels.
-

## Meal Prep Tips for a Week of Easy Breakfasts

If you have a little time on Sunday (or whatever day is your reset), here are some things you can prep to make your mornings smoother:

- **Hard-boil a few eggs** – They keep all week and are great on toast, in wraps, or just with salt.
- **Cook and crumble bacon or sausage** – Store in a container to toss into scrambled eggs or grits.
- **Make a batch of granola or muffins** – Portion into baggies or containers for grab-and-go.
- **Freeze smoothie packs** – Pre-portion fruit and greens in freezer bags so you can blend and go.
- **Whisk a dozen eggs with milk and pour into muffin tins** – Add cheese or veggies and bake for egg cups that last all week.
- **Make and freeze pancakes or waffles** – Reheat in the toaster just like store-bought.



You don't need fancy ingredients or lots of time to make breakfast meaningful. A few staples and a little prep go a long way. Even toast and peanut butter counts. Eat something warm, say a prayer over your day, and you're off to a good start.

## 7-Day Breakfast Meal Plan

### Simple & Real-Life Meals for One or Two

Day	Breakfast	Prep Notes
Monday	Egg Cups + Toast	Make egg cups Sunday and store in fridge. Toast fresh.
Tuesday	Peanut Butter Banana Wrap	Assemble in minutes or prep the night before and wrap in foil.
Wednesday	Baked French Toast (leftovers) + Fruit	Reheat slice from earlier batch. Add berries or banana.
Thursday	Smoothie + Muffin or Granola Bar	Use frozen smoothie pack. Grab a homemade bar or leftover baked good.
Friday	Toad in a Hole + Salsa	Quick stovetop breakfast. Use leftover salsa or make a small batch.
Saturday	Bagel with Cream Cheese and Salami + Coffee	Toast bagel and enjoy warm. Make-ahead and freeze bagels if needed.
Sunday	Clean-Out-the-Fridge Hash + Grits	Use up leftover meats/veggies. Grits come together in 10 minutes.

### Tips for the Week:

- **Double a batch of muffins, pancakes, or waffles** early in the week and freeze the extras.
  - **Boil 4–6 eggs on Sunday** to use in wraps, toast, or just for quick protein.
  - **Make a smoothie pack for each weekday** and store in freezer—just add milk and blend.
  - If you like variety, swap in breakfast burritos, cinnamon toast, or granola yogurt parfaits on any day.
-

# 7-Day Breakfast Meal Plan: Shopping List

## For One or Two People

### Pantry Staples

- Old-fashioned oats
- All-purpose or bread flour
- Baking powder
- Baking soda
- Sugar (white + brown)
- Salt
- Cinnamon
- Vanilla extract
- Maple syrup or pancake syrup
- Peanut butter
- Everything bagel seasoning
- Salsa
- Cooking oil or spray
- Coffee or tea (optional)

### Grains & Breads

- 1 loaf of sandwich bread (or 8–10 slices)
- 1–2 tortillas (for wrap)
- 2–3 bagels (or ingredients to make homemade)
- Muffins, waffles, or pancake mix (or ingredients to make from scratch)
- Granola or ingredients to make it (oats, nuts, honey)

### Protein

- 1 dozen eggs
- 4–6 slices bacon or sausage (or a small package)
- Sliced salami or ham
- Ground sausage or bacon bits (optional for hash or egg cups)
- Cheese (shredded cheddar, optional cream cheese)

### Dairy

- Milk (or almond/oat milk)
- Butter
- Greek yogurt or regular yogurt
- Cream cheese (for bagels)

### Produce

- 3–4 bananas (for smoothies, toast, and wraps)
- 1–2 apples or seasonal fruit
- 1 pint berries or frozen mixed berries
- 2–3 medium potatoes (for hash)
- 1 avocado (optional, for toast or topping)
- Onion (optional, for hash or egg cups)
- Spinach or leafy greens (optional, for smoothies or egg cups)

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# Asian Chicken Lettuce Wraps

## Ingredients (Serves 2)

- 1 cup cooked shredded or chopped chicken (leftover rotisserie works great)
- 1 tsp sesame oil (optional but adds flavor)
- 1–2 tsp soy sauce
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp ground ginger or minced fresh ginger
- Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 green onion, sliced
- ½ cup shredded carrots or coleslaw mix (optional)
- 4–6 large lettuce leaves (like romaine, bibb, or iceberg)
- Sweet chili sauce for serving

## Directions

1. In a skillet, warm the chicken with a splash of oil.
2. Stir in soy sauce, garlic, ginger, red pepper flakes, and green onions. Add shredded carrots or slaw if using.
3. Heat until warmed through and well combined.
4. Spoon the mixture into lettuce leaves and serve with sweet chili sauce on the side.

## Notes

- This recipe is a great way to use up leftover chicken.
- Add rice noodles, chopped peanuts, or diced bell peppers for variation.
- Can be served warm or cold—whatever your day calls for.

# Broccoli Cheese Soup

(for two)

## Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- ½ teaspoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup milk or half-and-half
- 1½ cups chopped broccoli (fresh or frozen)
- 1 small carrot, diced
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Pinch of paprika (optional)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

## Directions:

1. In a small pot, melt butter and cook onion until soft.
2. Stir in garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Add flour and stir to form a paste.
4. Slowly whisk in chicken broth.
5. Add broccoli, carrots, salt, pepper, and paprika. Simmer until tender.
6. Stir in milk and bring back to a gentle simmer.
7. Add cheese and stir until melted and creamy.

**Note:** To thicken the soup, add 2 tablespoons instant potato flakes and stir until desired consistency.

---

# Chicken Noodle Soup

(for two)

## Ingredients

- 2 cups water +  $\frac{1}{2}$  cube chicken bouillon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup diced onion
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 cup cooked or canned chicken
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup frozen mixed vegetables
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dry noodles or pasta of choice
- Salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes (optional)

## Directions:

1. In a small pot, combine water, bouillon, onion, and garlic. Bring to a boil.
2. Add chicken and vegetables. Simmer for 5 minutes.
3. Add noodles and boil for 2 minutes. Turn off heat and let sit covered for 10 minutes.
4. Season to taste.
- 5.

Note: This is our go-to for sick days—simple and comforting.



# Classic Egg Salad

## Ingredients (Serves 2)

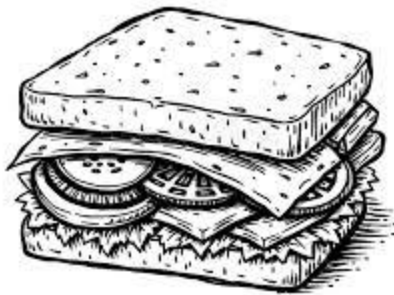
- 4 hardboiled eggs, peeled and chopped
- 2–3 tablespoons Miracle Whip (or mayonnaise)
- Salt and pepper, to taste

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, mash or chop the eggs to your preferred texture.
2. Stir in Miracle Whip and mix until creamy.
3. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Serve on bread, toast, crackers, or in lettuce wraps.

## Notes

- For extra flavor, add a little mustard or chopped sweet pickle relish.
- This packs well for lunches and is even better after a few hours in the fridge.
- Great with fresh sliced tomatoes or a sprinkle of paprika on top.



# Club Sandwiches

(for two)

## Ingredients

- 6 slices bread, toasted
- Miracle Whip or mayo
- 2 slices turkey or chicken lunch meat
- 2 cheese slices
- 2 slices cooked bacon
- 2 slices tomato
- Lettuce
- Optional: pickle slices

## Directions

1. Toast the bread and spread each slice with Miracle Whip.
2. Layer as follows: bread, bacon, lettuce, second bread slice, tomato, lunch meat, cheese, top slice of bread.
3. Slice in half or quarters and secure with toothpicks if desired.
- 4.

## Notes

Perfect for lunch after church or an easy picnic meal. Add pickle on the side for crunch.



# Cowboy Caviar

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 1/4 cup black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/4 cup black-eyed peas, drained
- 1/4 cup pinto beans, drained
- 1/4 cup kidney beans, drained
- 1/4 cup garbanzo beans, drained
- 1/4 cup corn, drained
- 1/4 cup lima beans, drained
- 1/4 cup finely chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons red bell pepper, diced
- 2 tablespoons yellow bell pepper, diced
- 2 tablespoons chopped purple onion
- 1/2 of a small jalapeño, minced (or a full one if you like heat)
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- Tortilla chips for serving

## Dressing

- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- Pinch of black pepper

## Directions

1. Drain and rinse the beans.
  2. Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl.
  3. In a separate small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Pour over the mixture and stir to combine.
  4. Serve immediately or refrigerate. Enjoy with tortilla chips or as a side dish.
-

# Cream of Chicken Soup

(for two)

## Ingredients

- 2 T butter
- 2 T diced celery
- 2 T diced carrot
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup minced cooked chicken
- 2 T flour
- Pinch salt and pepper
- ½ cup chicken broth
- ¾ cup milk

## Directions

1. In a saucepan, melt butter and sauté vegetables until tender. Add chicken.
2. Stir in flour, then slowly whisk in broth until smooth.
3. Bring to a light boil, stir until thickened (about 2 minutes).
4. Reduce heat and stir in milk. Simmer 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

## Notes

Freeze leftovers in small jars. Add extra broth to thin for soup or keep thick for casseroles.



# Cream of Mushroom Soup

(for two)

## Ingredients

- 2 T butter
- 4 oz mushrooms, chopped
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ½ clove garlic, minced
- 2 T flour
- Pinch salt and pepper
- ½ cup broth (beef or chicken)
- ¾ cup milk

## Directions

1. In a saucepan, melt butter and sauté mushrooms, onion, and garlic until soft.
2. Stir in flour and seasonings. Slowly add broth while stirring.
3. Bring to a boil to thicken, then reduce heat and stir in milk.
4. Simmer uncovered 10–15 minutes.

## Notes

Use for casseroles, over pork chops, or pasta. Can also be blended smooth.

---

# Creamy Chicken & Wild Rice Soup

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken
- 1/2 cup cooked wild rice blend
- 1/4 cup finely diced onion
- 1 small carrot, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups chicken broth (or 2 cups water + 1 bouillon cube)
- 1/2 cup milk or half & half
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Optional: pinch of dried thyme or parsley

## Directions

1. In a small pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion, carrot, and celery. Cook until vegetables are soft, about 5 minutes.
2. Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute to form a light roux.
3. Slowly whisk in the broth and bring to a simmer.
4. Add the chicken and cooked wild rice. Simmer for 5–10 minutes to heat through and blend flavors.
5. Stir in the milk and shredded cheddar cheese. Cook until melted and creamy.
6. Season with salt, pepper, and herbs if using.
7. Serve warm with bread or crackers.

## Notes:

This soup is perfect for using up leftover chicken and pre-cooked rice. Adjust the thickness with more milk or broth, if needed.

# Creamy Chicken Tortilla Soup

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken
- 1/2 cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/2 cup corn (frozen or canned, drained)
- 1/4 cup diced tomatoes (or use Ro-Tel for heat)
- 1/4 cup finely diced onion
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon butter or oil
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- Pinch of paprika or cayenne (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup half & half or milk
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional toppings: crushed tortilla chips, shredded cheese, sour cream, avocado, or fresh cilantro

## Directions

1. In a small pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; sauté until softened.
2. Stir in flour, cumin, and chili powder. Cook 1 minute to make a light roux.
3. Gradually whisk in the chicken broth and bring to a gentle boil.
4. Add chicken, black beans, corn, and tomatoes. Simmer for 10 minutes.
5. Stir in milk or half & half and reduce heat to low. Simmer until warm and creamy.
6. Taste and adjust salt, pepper, or spice to your preference.
7. Serve hot with your favorite toppings.

## Notes:

If you like heat, swap in pepper jack cheese or a dash of hot sauce. To make it even heartier, add 1/4 cup cooked rice or crushed tortilla chips into the soup before serving.

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# Cuban Egg Rolls

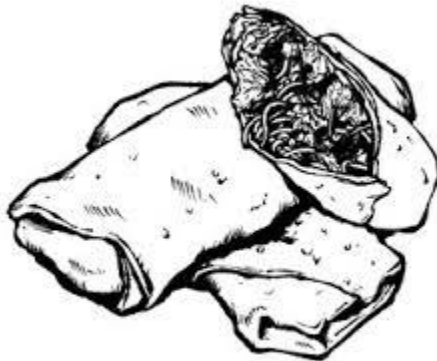
(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 4 egg roll wrappers
- 4 slices ham lunchmeat
- 2 slices provolone or Swiss cheese, halved
- 4 teaspoons mustard
- 4 small dill pickle spears or quartered pickle slices
- Small dish of water for sealing edges

## Directions

1. Lay an egg roll wrapper with a corner facing you. Add a slice of ham.
2. Spread 1 teaspoon mustard over ham.
3. Top with half a slice of cheese and one pickle spear.
4. Fold the sides in, roll tightly, and seal the top corner with water.
5. Repeat for all 4 rolls.
6. Air fry at 400°F for 8–10 minutes until golden and crisp.



# Easy Quesadillas (For Two)

## Ingredients

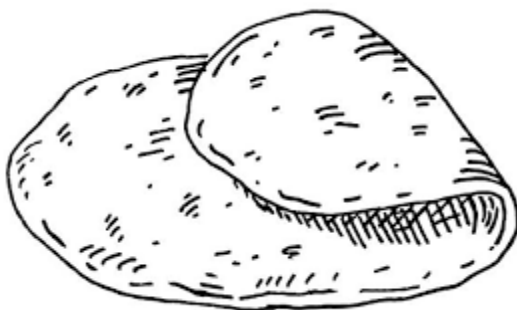
- 2 medium tortillas
- ½ cup refried beans
- ½ cup shredded cheese

## Directions

1. Spread beans on one tortilla, sprinkle cheese on top.
2. Place second tortilla on top.
3. Cook in skillet over medium heat until golden on both sides.
4. Cut into 4 wedges and serve.

## Notes

Add leftover meat or sautéed veggies. Great served with salsa or sour cream. Freeze cooked quesadillas and reheat in a toaster oven.



# Fruity Chicken Salad

## Ingredients (Serves 2)

- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded or diced (rotisserie or leftover works great)
- ¼ cup mayonnaise or Miracle Whip
- ¼ cup halved grapes (or chopped apple or canned mandarin oranges)
- 1 tablespoon chopped nuts (walnuts, pecans, or slivered almonds)
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Optional Add-ins

- A tiny squeeze of lemon juice
- A dash of onion powder or a spoonful of relish

## Directions

1. In a medium bowl, mix all ingredients together.
2. Chill for at least 30 minutes for best flavor.
3. Serve on croissants, sandwich bread, or lettuce leaves.

# Greek-Style Pita Bread for Pizza

*Serves 2 (makes 2 medium pitas)*

Soft and slightly chewy, these are perfect for sandwiches or as a base for personal pizzas.

## Ingredients

- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1 teaspoon active dry yeast
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1 cup all-purpose flour (plus extra as needed)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, combine warm water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until bubbly.
2. Stir in flour, salt, and olive oil. Mix to form a soft dough, then knead for 5 minutes until smooth and elastic.
3. Cover and let rise for about 1 hour or until doubled in size.
4. Divide dough in half. Roll each piece into a 6–7 inch circle.
5. Heat a lightly oiled skillet over medium heat. Cook each pita for 1–2 minutes per side until puffed and golden.
6. Cool slightly and use right away or store in an airtight bag for up to 2 days.

## Personal Pita Pizzas

*Serves 2 (makes 2 pizzas)*

These come together fast and can be made with whatever you have on hand.

## Ingredients

- 2 Greek-style pitas (from recipe above or store-bought)
  - 1/4 cup pizza sauce or marinara or alfredo sauce
-

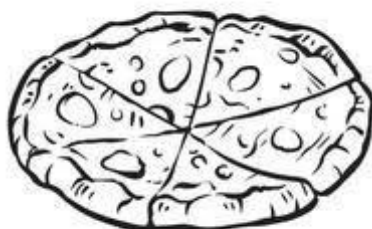
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella or ½ cup shredded cheddar
- Optional toppings: pepperoni, sliced bell peppers, onions, mild peppers, mushrooms, ham, or bacon

### **Directions**

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Place pitas on a baking sheet. Spread sauce evenly over each.
3. Add cheese and your favorite toppings.
4. Bake for 8–10 minutes, or until cheese is melted and bubbly.
5. Slice and serve warm.

### **Notes:**

You can freeze cooked pita bread and pull it out as needed. The pizzas also make a great lunch for kids—just let them add their own toppings.



# Lunchmeat Sandwich Spread

## Ingredients

- ½ cup good-quality bologna, ham, or chicken lunchmeat
- 2 Tbsp Miracle Whip
- 1 Tbsp relish
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Directions

1. Place lunchmeat in a food processor and pulse until finely chopped.
2. Transfer to a bowl and mix in Miracle Whip and relish. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Serve chilled with crackers or on soft sandwich bread.

## Notes

This was Grandma's favorite version—she used a bologna ring or finely ground ham from the deli.

You can also use shredded chicken lunchmeat if that's what you have.

To save time, grind and freeze the meat in advance, then thaw and mix when needed.

---

# Ham and Provolone Sliders

## Ingredients (Makes 4 sliders)

- 4 small slider buns or Hawaiian rolls
- 4 slices deli ham
- 2 slices provolone cheese, halved
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon yellow or Dijon mustard
- Optional: pinch of poppy seeds or onion flakes

## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Slice the buns in half horizontally (keep tops and bottoms connected if using Hawaiian rolls).
3. Layer ham and provolone on the bottom buns. Place tops back on.
4. In a small saucepan or microwave-safe bowl, melt the butter. Stir in brown sugar and mustard until smooth.
5. Brush the sauce over the tops of the buns. Sprinkle with poppy seeds or onion flakes if desired.
6. Cover loosely with foil and bake for 10–12 minutes, or until cheese is melted and tops are lightly golden.

## Notes

- These are freezer-friendly: assemble, wrap tightly, and freeze before baking. Reheat in the oven when ready to eat.
- Try with turkey and Swiss, or roast beef and cheddar for variations.
- Perfect served with soup, fruit, or a side salad.

# Hearty Cabbage Vegetable Soup

(for two)

## Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¼ small onion, chopped
- ½ clove garlic, minced
- 1 cup shredded cabbage
- ½ cup chopped carrots
- ¼ cup chopped celery
- ½ cup frozen mixed vegetables
- ½ can seasoned diced tomatoes
- 2 cups broth (vegetable or chicken)
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Optional: ½ cup diced potatoes

## Directions:

1. In a small pot, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil.
2. Add remaining veggies and broth.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer.
4. Cook until vegetables are tender.
5. Season with salt and pepper.

**Freezer Tip:** This soup freezes well. Cool before transferring to freezer containers.

---

# Homemade Chicken Patties (or Nuggets)

## Ingredients (Makes about 4 patties or 8 nuggets)

- 1 large chicken breast, cut into chunks and ground in a food processor
- ½ cup breadcrumbs (plus more for coating)
- 1 egg
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 1 tsp mustard
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Oil for pan frying

## Directions

1. Grind chicken breast in a food processor until finely chopped.
2. In a bowl, mix chicken with egg, breadcrumbs, and all seasonings.
3. Shape into small patties or nugget-sized pieces.
4. Coat each patty lightly in additional breadcrumbs.
5. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat. Fry patties until golden brown and internal temp reaches 165°F (about 3–4 minutes per side).
6. Drain on paper towels and serve with dipping sauce.

## Notes

- You can freeze uncooked patties between parchment paper. Thaw slightly before cooking.
- Great for sandwiches, wraps, or cut into strips for salads.

# Homemade Dipping Sauces

## McDonald's Sweet & Sour (Copycat)

- ¼ cup apricot preserves
  - 2 tsp rice vinegar or apple cider vinegar
  - 1 tsp soy sauce
  - 1 tsp cornstarch + 1 Tbsp water (optional, to thicken)
- Mix all ingredients and warm gently on the stove until smooth and slightly thickened.

## Hot Honey Dip

- ¼ cup honey
  - ½ tsp hot sauce (like Frank's or Sriracha), or to taste
- Warm together slightly and stir until blended.

## Mock Chick-fil-A Sauce

- 2 Tbsp mayo
  - 1 Tbsp honey
  - 1 Tbsp yellow mustard
  - 1 tsp BBQ sauce
- Stir until smooth. Chill before serving.
-

# Lentil Rice Casserole

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup uncooked lentils
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup rice
- 2 tbsp minced dried onion (or 2 tbsp finely chopped fresh onion)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups chicken or vegetable broth
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp basil
- $\frac{1}{8}$  tsp oregano
- $\frac{1}{8}$  tsp thyme
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp minced garlic
- optional:  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup shredded cheese

## Directions

1. Combine all ingredients (except cheese) in a small slow cooker or saucepan.
2. Cook on high for 2 hours or low for 4–5 hours until the lentils and rice are soft and liquid is absorbed.
3. Stir in cheese at the end, if using.

## Notes

Serve wrapped in small tortillas or as a warm bowl with crackers or toast. Great with a side of fruit or a green salad.

# Macaroni and Cheese

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 1 cup elbow macaroni
- 1 cup milk (more or less, just enough to cover 1/3 of the baking dish)
- 1/4 cup canned cheddar cheese sauce (or use homemade—see next page)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (or a mix of mozzarella, Colby, or whatever's on hand)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon chicken bouillon powder

## Directions

1. Cook the macaroni in boiling water for about 6–7 minutes—just until al dente. Drain and place into a greased small baking dish (about 8x8 or a personal casserole dish).
2. Pour in enough milk to just cover the bottom third of the macaroni in the dish.
3. Add in the shredded cheese and canned cheddar cheese. Stir gently to combine.
4. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in the chicken bouillon for added flavor.
5. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for about 30 minutes, until hot and bubbly.
6. Remove foil and bake an additional 5–10 minutes if you'd like a lightly crisped top.

## Notes

This is an easy comfort meal for two. You can add extras like leftover hot dogs or frozen peas to make it more filling.

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# Homemade Cheese Sauce (Substitute for Canned Cheese)

## Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk (whole milk works best)
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese (or a mix of cheeses)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Optional: pinch of garlic powder or a dash of mustard for flavor

## Instructions:

1. In a small saucepan, melt butter over medium heat.
2. Whisk in flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly.
3. Slowly whisk in the milk, making sure there are no lumps.
4. Stir continuously until the mixture thickens, about 3–5 minutes.
5. Remove from heat and stir in shredded cheese until fully melted and smooth.
6. Taste and season with salt and optional seasonings if desired.

## Notes:

Use immediately in macaroni and cheese or as a dip. This sauce replaces the canned cheddar cheese in your baked mac and cheese for a more natural and flavorful result.



# Orzo with Parmesan

## Ingredients

- 1/2 cup uncooked orzo pasta
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3/4 cup chicken broth
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- Pinch of pepper

## Directions

1. In a small skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add orzo and sauté until lightly golden.
2. Stir in the chicken broth and bring to a gentle boil.
3. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 10–12 minutes, or until the liquid is mostly absorbed and orzo is tender.
4. Stir in Parmesan, basil, and a pinch of pepper. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.

## Notes

This pairs well with roasted vegetables or grilled meat, and it makes a comforting lunch all on its own.

---

# Pasta, Broccoli, and Parmesan Bowl

## Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups dry bowtie pasta (or your favorite shape)
- 1 cup cooked chicken fajita strips (store-bought or homemade)
- 1 ½ cups broccoli florets (fresh or frozen)
- 1–2 tsp olive oil or butter
- Salt, pepper, and garlic powder to taste
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

## Directions

1. Cook pasta in salted water according to package instructions. Drain and set aside.
2. In the same pot, heat oil or butter and sauté chicken and broccoli until warmed through and broccoli is tender.
3. Add cooked pasta back to the pot. Sprinkle with garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
4. Stir in Parmesan cheese and toss everything together until well coated. Serve warm.

## Notes

- You can use rotisserie chicken or diced grilled chicken instead.
- This recipe doubles easily for meal prep or feeding more people.
- Add crushed red pepper flakes for a little heat or a splash of lemon juice for brightness.

# Poor Boy Subs for Two

## Ingredients (Makes 2 subs)

- 2 sub rolls or hoagie buns
- 4 slices ham lunchmeat
- 4 slices chicken lunchmeat
- 4 slices salami
- 2 slices provolone cheese
- 3 oz cream cheese (softened)
- 2 tablespoons butter (softened)
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- ½ teaspoon minced garlic

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, mix cream cheese, butter, mustard, and garlic until smooth.
2. Slice each sub roll lengthwise, not cutting all the way through.
3. Spread the creamy mixture on both inside halves of each roll.
4. Layer lunchmeats and cheese evenly between the two sandwiches.
5. Wrap each sub in foil. Bake at 350°F for about 15–20 minutes, until hot and the cheese is melted.

## Notes

- These are delicious served with lettuce, pickles, or tomato if you like.
  - You can wrap and freeze them before baking. Just thaw overnight and bake when ready.
  - Perfect for lunchboxes, quick dinners, or make-ahead freezer meals.
-

# Pretzel Dogs

(Serves 2)

## Ingredients

- 1/4 cup warm water
- 1/2 teaspoon granulated sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 3/4 teaspoon active dry yeast
- 2/3 cup all-purpose flour (plus a little extra if needed)
- 2 teaspoons melted unsalted butter
- 2 hot dogs
- 4 cups water + 3 tablespoons baking soda (for boiling)
- 1 egg yolk (you'll only use a little—save the rest)
- Pretzel salt or everything bagel seasoning
- Melted butter (for brushing)

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, dissolve sugar and yeast in warm water. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until foamy.
2. Stir in salt, melted butter, and flour to form a soft dough. Add a touch more flour if needed.
3. Knead briefly, cover, and let rise until doubled (about 30–45 minutes).
4. Preheat oven to 425°F.
5. Boil water and baking soda in a small saucepan.
6. Roll dough into a thin rectangle and cut into 2 long strips.
7. Wrap each hot dog with dough strip, pinching ends to seal.
8. Dip wrapped dogs in the baking soda water for 30 seconds, then drain on paper towel.
9. Place on a baking sheet. Brush lightly with egg yolk and sprinkle with pretzel salt or seasoning.
10. Bake for 10–12 minutes until golden brown. Brush with melted butter and serve warm.

# Savory Chicken & Veggie Bites

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 cup ground chicken
- 1/2 cup diced onion
- 1 cup frozen broccoli Normandy mix, thawed
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 3/4 cup fine almond flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp paprika
- Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)

## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or grease a muffin tin.
2. Add all ingredients to a food processor. Pulse until the mixture is well combined but still slightly textured.
3. Scoop the mixture into 4–6 muffin cups or drop rounded portions onto the prepared baking sheet.
4. Bake for 20–25 minutes, or until golden on top and fully set.
5. Let cool for a few minutes before serving.

## Notes:

Store extras in the fridge for up to 3 days. These also freeze well—just reheat in the oven or microwave before serving. You can swap the Parmesan for any shredded cheese on hand.

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# Small Batch Homemade Hamburger Buns

## Ingredients (Makes 2–3 buns)

- ½ cup warm water + 1 tablespoon (about 110°F)
- 1¼ teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon oil (vegetable or olive oil)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 small egg (or half a large egg, beaten and divided—save rest for brushing tops)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ to 1½ cups all-purpose or bread flour

## Directions

1. In a mixing bowl, stir together warm water, yeast, oil, and sugar. Let sit 5–10 minutes until foamy.
2. Add the beaten egg (reserving a little to brush the tops), salt, and 1 cup of flour. Mix.
3. Gradually stir in remaining flour until a soft dough forms—not too sticky, but not dry.
4. Knead 4–5 minutes by hand or mixer until smooth and elastic.
5. Cover and let rise 30–45 minutes until doubled.
6. Divide and shape into 2–3 round buns. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
7. Let rise another 20 minutes. Brush tops with the reserved egg and sprinkle with sesame seeds if desired.
8. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, until golden. Cool before slicing.

## Notes

- For softer buns, brush warm tops with melted butter after baking.
- You can freeze leftover buns or dough.
- These also make great sandwich rolls!

# Small Batch Sub Buns

## Ingredients (Makes 2–3 sub buns)

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup hot water (not boiling, around 110°F)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon active dry yeast
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon oil
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cups bread flour (or all-purpose)

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, mix water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until bubbly.
2. Stir in salt and oil, then gradually mix in flour until a soft, slightly sticky dough forms.
3. Knead for 4–5 minutes until smooth and elastic.
4. Cover and let rise in a warm place for about 45 minutes, or until doubled.
5. Divide into 2 or 3 portions and shape into long sub rolls.
6. Place on a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet. Let rise again for 20–30 minutes.
7. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, or until golden brown.
8. Cool on a wire rack. Brush tops with butter if desired.

## Notes

- Sub bun molds can help keep the shape—look for silicone ones online.
  - These are freezer-friendly. Wrap cooled rolls tightly and freeze.
  - Great for homemade meatball subs, deli sandwiches, or even toasted garlic subs.
-

# Snackle Plate Lunch

## Ingredients

Choose a mix of:

- 6–8 crackers (buttery, whole grain, or flavored)
- 4–6 slices lunchmeat (turkey, ham, or chicken)
- 4 slices salami or pepperoni
- 2 oz cubed or sliced cheese (cheddar, colby jack, or mozzarella)
- ½ cup grapes or apple slices
- 2–3 T hummus (plain, roasted red pepper, or garlic)
- A small handful of nuts (almonds, cashews, or mixed)
- Optional: pickles, olives, baby carrots, or a boiled egg

## Directions

1. Arrange all ingredients neatly on a divided plate or in a lunchbox.
2. Serve cold with napkins or toothpicks for easy snacking.

## Notes

- Great for picky eaters, busy days, or even road trips!
- Swap hummus for ranch dip or peanut butter if preferred.
- This works beautifully as a “clean out the fridge” kind of lunch—anything goes.
- Pack in small containers for lunchboxes or prep ahead in divided containers for the week.

Whether you're packing a lunch, eating at home between tasks, or feeding a hungry toddler, having a few lunch basics on hand makes the midday meal easier. Lunch doesn't have to be fancy—it just needs to fill your belly and give you a little energy to finish the day strong.

## Lunch Basics to Keep on Hand

Here are a few staples I try to always keep stocked for quick, no-fuss lunches:

- **Tortillas or Bread** – Sandwiches, wraps, quesadillas, toast.
  - **Cooked Chicken or Deli Meat** – Great for salads, sandwiches, and wraps.
  - **Hard-Boiled Eggs** – Add protein to toast, salad, or just eat with salt.
  - **Cheese** – Slices for sandwiches, shredded for quesadillas or pasta.
  - **Frozen Veggies** – Toss into soups, pastas, or hashes.
  - **Canned Beans** – Mash for wraps or stir into casseroles and soups.
  - **Leftover Rice or Pasta** – Use as a base for bowls, stir-fries, or baked dishes.
  - **Simple Sauces** – Mayo, mustard, ranch, salsa, hot sauce, or vinaigrettes.
  - **Fresh Veggies** – Carrots, cucumbers, lettuce, and tomatoes go a long way.
  - **Fruits** – Apples, bananas, and grapes are low-prep and travel well.
  - **Crackers, Hummus, or Peanut Butter** – Great for snack lunches or sides.
-

## Meal Prep Tips for a Week of Easy Lunches

With just a little prep, you can make weekday lunches faster and more enjoyable:

- Cook extra chicken or ground meat and store for wraps, bowls, or salads.
- Make a simple pasta salad or grain salad and divide into small containers.
- Boil eggs and store in the fridge for quick protein.
- Slice veggies and store in jars or bags for easy grabbing.
- Prep one or two dips (like hummus or ranch) for fresh veggies and wraps.
- Double dinner one night and save the extra for lunch the next day.

## 7-Day Lunch Plan

### Real Food for One or Two

Day	Lunch	Prep Notes
<b>Monday</b>	Chicken Quesadillas + Apple Slices	Use leftover chicken and shredded cheese in a tortilla. Toast on stovetop.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Egg Salad Sandwich + Cucumber Sticks	Mix eggs ahead and store for 2–3 days. Add crunchy veggies.
<b>Wednesday</b>	Pasta Salad + Hard-Boiled Egg	Use any pasta and chopped veggies. Dress with olive oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper.
<b>Thursday</b>	Turkey Wrap + Carrot Sticks & Ranch	Roll turkey, cheese, and lettuce in a tortilla. Dip veggies in ranch or hummus.
<b>Friday</b>	Lentil Rice Casserole + Grapes	Reheat a prepped casserole. Serve with fruit on the side.
<b>Saturday</b>	Mini Snack Plate: Crackers, Cheese, Veggies, Egg	Use up odds and ends for a little lunch board. Keep it simple.
<b>Sunday</b>	Soup & Toast	Heat up homemade or store-bought soup. Add buttered toast or a biscuit.

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# Lunch Plan: Shopping List

## For One or Two People

### Pantry

- Crackers
- Rice or pasta
- Canned beans (black beans, chickpeas)
- Tortillas
- Bread (sandwich or sub rolls)
- Peanut butter or hummus
- Ranch or vinaigrette
- Salt, pepper, and basic spices
- Cooking oil or spray

### Protein

- Cooked chicken or rotisserie chicken
- 4–6 eggs (plus more for boiling)
- Deli turkey or ham
- Shredded cheese
- Block cheese or string cheese
- Canned or cooked lentils

### Dairy

- Butter
- Cream cheese or dressing (optional for wraps)

### Produce

- Apples
- Grapes or bananas
- Lettuce or spinach
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Onion
- Tomatoes (or grape tomatoes)
- Bell peppers (optional)

### Optional Freezer Items

- Frozen broccoli or mixed veggies
- Pre-cooked meatballs or chicken strips
- Soup portions or casserole leftovers

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# 10 Kid Taco Chili

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 can (15 oz) pinto beans, drained
- 1/2 can diced tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup canned corn
- 1/2 can (15 oz) chili beans
- 2 tablespoons green chilies
- 1/4 lb ground beef, cooked
- 2 tablespoons diced onion
- 1 tablespoon ranch powder
- 1 tablespoon taco seasoning
- Optional toppings: lettuce, sour cream, ranch, corn chips, salsa, shredded cheese

## Directions

1. In a saucepan, combine all ingredients. Simmer on low for 30 minutes to blend flavors.
2. Serve with your favorite toppings.

## Notes

This recipe is easy to multiply for a crowd. Great over rice or baked potatoes. For dairy-free, use dairy-free ranch or omit cheese and sour cream. Freeze leftovers in single-serve portions.



# Bowtie Sausage Casserole ( Jared casserole)

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 4 oz smoked sausage, cut into small chunks
- 1 cup Alfredo sauce
- 2 cups cooked bowtie pasta
- 1/2 cup diced tomatoes (canned)
- 1/4 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped red pepper
- 1/4 cup diced onion
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- Salt and pepper, to taste

## Directions

1. In a medium skillet over medium heat, cook the sausage until browned.
  2. Add the peppers, onion, and garlic. Cook until softened. Reduce heat to low.
  3. Stir in the tomatoes and Alfredo sauce. Let simmer for 2–3 minutes.
  4. Add the cooked pasta and stir to combine.
  5. Heat through and serve warm.
-

# Chicken Pesto Tortellini

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 cups frozen cheese tortellini
- 1/2 cup Alfredo sauce
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons pesto
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 3/4 cup cooked shredded chicken
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine tortellini, Alfredo sauce, garlic, pesto, mozzarella, and chicken.
3. Pour into a small baking dish and top with Parmesan cheese.
4. Bake for 25–30 minutes, until bubbly and cheese is melted.

## Notes

This recipe freezes well. To freeze: assemble, cover with wax paper and foil, and store up to 3 months. To cook, thaw overnight and bake as directed.



# Chicken Pot Pie

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 single pie crust (half of a 15 oz package)
- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken
- 1/2 cup homemade cream of chicken soup (see note)
- 1/2 cup canned mixed vegetables, drained

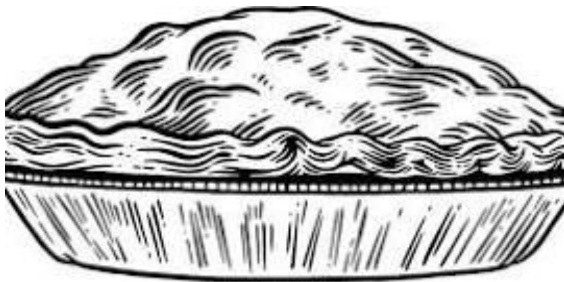
## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Place the bottom pie crust in a small baking dish and bake according to package instructions.
2. In a bowl, combine chicken, vegetables, and soup.
3. Spoon mixture into the crust-lined pan. Cover with top crust, sealing edges and cutting slits in the top.
4. Bake at 350°F for 30–40 minutes, or until golden brown.

## Notes

**Freezer Meal Option:** Do not pre-bake the bottom crust. Assemble fully, wrap, and freeze. Thaw overnight and bake at 375°F until golden.

**Homemade Cream of Chicken Soup:** Use 3/4 cup milk, 3/4 cup chicken broth, 3 tablespoons flour, 2 tablespoons butter, and salt/pepper. Whisk in a saucepan over medium heat until thickened.



# Fettuccine Alfredo

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 4 oz dry fettuccine (or 6 oz fresh)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Optional: pinch of garlic powder or nutmeg

## Directions

1. Cook fettuccine in salted boiling water until tender. Drain and set aside.
2. In a saucepan over medium-low heat, melt butter. Stir in cream and bring just to a simmer.
3. Add Parmesan and whisk until smooth and slightly thickened. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Toss in the cooked pasta and stir to coat. Heat gently until warmed through.
5. Serve immediately, with extra Parmesan on top if desired.

## Notes

This dish comes together quickly—have everything prepped before starting. For added flavor, stir in a little garlic powder or freshly grated nutmeg. Serve with grilled chicken, shrimp, or steamed broccoli for a full meal.

# Flatbread Tacos

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef, cooked
- 1/2 packet taco seasoning
- 1/2 cup drained pinto beans
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 large refrigerated biscuits
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon ranch powder
- Shredded cheese, to taste
- Shredded lettuce, to taste
- Salsa, for serving

## Directions

1. In a small skillet over medium-low heat, combine ground beef, taco seasoning, pinto beans, and water. Let simmer until heated through and thickened.
2. Meanwhile, roll out biscuits into flat rounds like pancakes. Cook each side in a lightly oiled skillet over medium heat until golden and cooked through.
3. In a small bowl, mix sour cream with ranch powder.
4. To serve, spread the ranch sour cream on each flatbread, top with meat mixture, and add cheese, lettuce, and salsa as desired.

## Notes

You can use canned biscuits or homemade. These also make great lunch leftovers—just store the flatbreads and toppings separately and reheat as needed.

---

# Fried Rice

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon oil (vegetable or sesame)
- 1 cup cooked and chilled rice (white or jasmine works well)
- 1/2 cup cooked chicken or beef, chopped
- 1/2 cup frozen mixed vegetables
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce or liquid aminos (more to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon sesame oil (optional)
- Sweet chili sauce, for serving

## Directions

1. In a skillet or wok, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add mixed vegetables and stir-fry for 2–3 minutes.
2. Push veggies to the side and scramble eggs in the same pan.
3. Add cooked meat and rice. Stir well to combine.
4. Drizzle with soy sauce or liquid aminos and sesame oil. Stir and fry everything until heated through and lightly crisped.
5. Serve hot with a drizzle of sweet chili sauce on top or on the side.

## Notes

Chilled rice works best for texture. Use whatever meat you have on hand—leftover roast chicken, ground beef, or kielbasa.

We often enjoy this with a packet of *nasi goreng* seasoning and kielbasa, which you can find sold on Amazon. It adds a deep, savory flavor to the rice



# Ground Beef Stroganoff

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 2 tablespoons diced onion
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon beef bouillon powder
- 1/2 can (5 oz) cream of mushroom soup
- 1 cup cooked egg noodles
- 1/4 cup sour cream

## Directions

1. Brown beef and onion in a skillet. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Stir in bouillon and soup. Simmer 5 minutes.
3. Add noodles and mix well.
4. Stir in sour cream and heat through. Serve warm.

## Notes

Quick and hearty. Can be doubled easily. Add peas or mushrooms if desired.

---

# Hamburger Gravy

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 3/4 cup beef broth, divided
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- Hot mashed potatoes, for serving

## Directions

1. In a skillet, cook ground beef over medium heat until browned. Drain excess grease.
2. Add 1/2 cup beef broth, onion, parsley, garlic, salt, and pepper. Simmer uncovered for 5–7 minutes or until onion is soft.
3. In a small bowl, whisk cornstarch with remaining 1/4 cup broth until smooth.
4. Stir into beef mixture and bring to a boil. Cook for 1–2 minutes, stirring constantly, until thickened.
5. Serve hot over mashed potatoes.

## Notes

This dish is pure comfort food and a favorite from childhood. For extra flavor, add 1/2 teaspoon beef bouillon powder while simmering. Serve with peas and carrots if you like a complete plate.

# Ham Skillet

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked penne pasta
- 1 cup leftover ham, chopped
- 1/4 medium onion, chopped (or 1/2 teaspoon dried minced onion)
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon each dried oregano and basil
- 3/4 cup chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Optional: 2 tablespoons diced red pepper

## Directions

1. In a skillet, combine all ingredients except the pasta and Parmesan cheese.
2. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Stir in cooked pasta and heat through.
4. Just before serving, sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

## Notes

A simple and comforting way to use up leftover holiday ham. You can double the recipe if you're serving more or want leftovers.

---

# Jambalaya

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1/4 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/4 stalk celery, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 cup cooked shredded chicken
- 4 oz smoked sausage, sliced
- 1/2 cup diced tomatoes (canned)
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup cooked rice
- Cajun seasoning, to taste

## Directions

1. In a small saucepan, sauté onion, pepper, and celery in oil until soft.
2. Stir in garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Add chicken, sausage, tomatoes, broth, and cooked rice. Season with Cajun spice to taste.
4. Simmer gently for 10–15 minutes, uncovered, until flavors are combined and most liquid is absorbed.

## Notes

This version skips shrimp due to allergies, but still delivers on that bold Cajun flavor. You can add a splash of hot sauce for extra heat.

# Nachos

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 cups tortilla chips
- 1/2 cup cooked ground beef, seasoned with taco seasoning
- 1/4 cup refried beans (see note)
- 1/4 cup homemade cheese sauce (see note)
- 1/4 cup shredded lettuce
- 2 tablespoons salsa
- 2 tablespoons chopped onions, peppers, or tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons sour cream

## Directions

1. Arrange tortilla chips on a plate or small baking tray.
2. Warm the refried beans and spoon over chips.
3. Add seasoned ground beef. Drizzle with homemade cheese sauce.
4. Top with lettuce, salsa, chopped veggies, and a dollop of sour cream.
5. Serve immediately.

## Notes

You can make your own refried beans by cooking dry pinto beans, pureeing them, and freezing in small containers for quick use.

For a simple homemade cheese sauce, melt 1 tablespoon butter in a saucepan, whisk in 1 tablespoon flour, then slowly add 1/2 cup milk. Stir until thickened, then mix in 1/2 cup shredded cheddar until melted and smooth.

This meal is easy to customize with what you have on hand. Great for using up taco leftovers, and very budget-friendly.

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# Pizza Dough

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon active dry yeast
- 2/3 cup warm water
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour (more as needed)
- Optional: 1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning and a pinch of garlic powder

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, stir together yeast, warm water, and sugar. Let sit for 5 minutes until foamy.
2. Add oil, salt, and optional seasonings. Stir in flour gradually until a soft dough forms.
3. Knead for 3–5 minutes on a floured surface until smooth. Let rise in a covered bowl for 30–45 minutes or until doubled.
4. Punch down and roll out into two small rounds or one medium crust.
5. Bake at 425°F for 8 minutes before adding toppings.
6. Add toppings of choice, then bake again until golden and cheese is melted (usually 8–10 minutes).

## Notes

This smaller dough batch is perfect for two individual pizzas or one medium-size pizza.

### **Favorite combinations:**

- **Mac & Cheese Pizza:** Alfredo sauce base, leftover mac and cheese, shredded cheddar
- **Sub Pizza:** Alfredo, ham, sausage, veggies—top after baking with lettuce, tomato, dressing
- **Cinnamon Sticks:** Brush dough with butter, cinnamon, and sugar; bake, then drizzle with powdered sugar icing

# Restaurant Breadsticks

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons oil (vegetable or olive oil)
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

## For Topping

- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- Pinch of garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
- Pinch of Italian seasoning

## Directions

1. In a mixing bowl, combine warm water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until foamy.
2. Stir in salt, oil, and flour. Mix and knead until soft and smooth.
3. Cover and let rise for 30–45 minutes until doubled.
4. Divide dough into 8 breadstick-shaped strips. Place on a greased baking sheet.
5. Let rise for another 20 minutes.
6. Bake at 400°F for 12–15 minutes, or until golden.
7. While warm, brush with melted butter and sprinkle with garlic powder, Parmesan, and Italian seasoning.

## Notes

Serve with warm marinara sauce for dipping. These freeze well—just reheat in the oven before serving.

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# Salisbury Steak

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 3 tablespoons seasoned bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- 1/2 teaspoon beef bouillon powder
- 1/2 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon butter (for browning)
- 1/4 onion, finely diced
- 1 cup beef broth, divided
- 1/2 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 tablespoon ketchup
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 cup cooked egg noodles
- 1 teaspoon butter (for tossing noodles)

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, mix ground beef, bread crumbs, mustard, ketchup, beef bouillon, Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper, and egg. Form into 2–3 small patties.
2. In a skillet over medium heat, melt 1 tablespoon butter. Brown patties on both sides and transfer to a small baking dish.
3. In the same skillet, cook diced onions until soft.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk 1/4 cup of the broth with cornstarch. Set aside.
5. Add remaining 3/4 cup broth, Worcestershire sauce, and ketchup to the skillet. Stir in mustard and bring to a simmer. Slowly add cornstarch mixture and stir until thickened.
6. Pour the sauce over patties in the baking dish. Cover and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes, until patties are cooked through.
7. Serve over cooked egg noodles tossed with a bit of butter.

## Notes

Adding an egg to the patty mixture helps bind the ingredients and keeps the steak moist. This meal pairs well with peas or green beans on the side.

# Sausage Red Beans and Rice

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1/2 stalk celery, diced
- 1/4 teaspoon each basil and oregano
- 4 oz smoked sausage, sliced
- 1/2 cup diced tomatoes (canned)
- 1/2 cup chili beans (canned)
- 1/4 cup tomato sauce
- 1 cup cooked rice

## Directions

1. In a skillet over medium heat, fry sausage until browned.
2. Add onion and celery. Cook until softened.
3. Stir in tomatoes, beans, tomato sauce, and seasonings.
4. Simmer on low for 30–40 minutes to blend flavors.
5. Serve over cooked rice.

## Notes

To make this in a slow cooker: cook on low for 2–3 hours.

For a freezer meal: combine all raw ingredients (except rice) in a freezer bag. Thaw overnight and cook as directed.

---

# Shepherd's Pie

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- Salt, pepper, and 1 teaspoon beef bouillon
- 1/2 cup cream of mushroom soup (see homemade option)
- 3/4 cup frozen peas and carrots
- 1 cup mashed potatoes (prepared)
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese

## Directions

1. Cook beef and onion in a skillet. Season with salt, pepper, and bouillon.
2. Stir in soup and heat through. Pour into a small baking dish.
3. Top with peas and carrots.
4. Spread mashed potatoes on top and sprinkle with cheese.
5. Bake at 350°F for 30–40 minutes, until golden and bubbly.

## Notes

You can use homemade or instant potatoes. For a dairy-free version, swap in mushroom broth and thickener for the soup.

# Sloppy Joes

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/4 onion, finely diced
- 1/4 green pepper, finely diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1/2 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 tablespoon tomato paste (optional for richer flavor)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 hamburger buns, toasted (homemade or store-bought)

## Directions

1. In a skillet over medium heat, melt butter and sauté onion and green pepper until softened, about 4–5 minutes.
2. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds. Stir in ground beef and cook until browned. Drain grease.
3. Add ketchup, water, brown sugar, chili powder, mustard, Worcestershire, and tomato paste.
4. Simmer for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until thick and flavorful.
5. Serve warm on toasted buns.

## Variations

**Homemade Buns:** Use soft homemade hamburger buns for extra comfort. You can make a small batch and freeze extras for later.

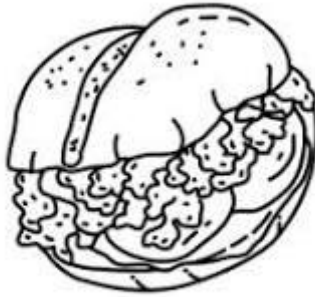
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## Sloppy Joe Bombs:

1. Prepare homemade roll or bun dough. After the first rise, divide and roll each piece into a flat circle.
2. Spoon a small amount of sloppy joe filling in the center, add a bit of shredded cheese, and fold the dough over like a pouch, pinching edges to seal.
3. Place seam-side down on a greased baking sheet. Let rise for 15 minutes, then bake at 375°F for 15–18 minutes, or until golden.

### Notes

These are easy to stretch for more people or double for the freezer. The “bombs” make great lunchbox or picnic options.



# Smoky Sloppy Joe Biscuit Cups

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 1/4 cup BBQ sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon mustard
- 1/4 cup cooked bacon pieces or bits
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 3 refrigerated biscuits

## Directions

1. In a skillet, cook beef with salt, pepper, and onion (optional). Stir in BBQ sauce, mustard, and bacon. Simmer 3 minutes.
2. Press each biscuit into a muffin tin, forming up the sides.
3. Fill with meat mixture and sprinkle with cheese.
4. Bake at 375°F for 18–20 minutes, or until biscuits are golden.

## Notes

These freeze well after baking. Reheat in the oven or air fryer for a quick lunch.

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# Southern Slaw Dogs

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 hot dogs
- 2 buns
- Mustard
- Diced onions

## Slaw

- 1 cup coleslaw mix
- 1/4 cup Miracle Whip
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar

## Chili

- 1/4 lb ground beef
- 2 tablespoons diced onion
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Pinch paprika
- Pinch garlic powder
- Salt to taste

## Directions

1. In a small bowl, mix slaw ingredients. Chill until ready to use.
2. In a skillet, cook ground beef and onion until browned.
3. Pulse in food processor for a fine texture if desired.
4. Return to skillet. Add remaining chili ingredients and simmer 10–15 minutes.
5. Cook hot dogs by your preferred method.
6. Serve in buns topped with chili, slaw, mustard, and onions.

## Notes

A regional favorite. The slaw can be made ahead and stored for 1–2 days in the fridge.

# Spaghetti with Ground Beef

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 4 oz dry spaghetti
- 1/2 tablespoon oil
- 1/2 lb ground beef
- 1/4 cup diced onion (optional)
- 1 garlic clove, minced (optional)
- 1/2 can (8 oz) tomato sauce
- 1/2 can (7 oz) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Grated Parmesan, for serving (optional)

## Directions

1. Cook spaghetti in salted water according to package directions. Drain and set aside.
2. In a skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add ground beef (and onion/garlic if using) and cook until browned. Drain grease if needed.
3. Stir in tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Toss in cooked spaghetti and stir to coat. Simmer another 2–3 minutes to combine flavors.
5. Serve warm with grated Parmesan, if desired.

## Notes

You can use crushed tomatoes in place of diced for a smoother sauce. Add a pinch of sugar to balance acidity if needed. Great with a side of breadsticks or salad.

## Optional Baked Version

Turn this into baked spaghetti by layering as follows in a small greased baking dish:

- Bottom layer: half of the spaghetti mixed with meat sauce
  - Middle layer: a few spoonfuls of cream of mushroom soup spread evenly and a sprinkle of shredded mozzarella
  - Top layer: remaining spaghetti and meat sauce
  - Finish with a generous layer of mozzarella cheese on top
-

- Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes until bubbly and lightly golden on top.
- **Notes**  
Baked spaghetti is a great way to use leftovers or feed more people. You can also add extra veggies like mushrooms or spinach to stretch the meal.



# Sweet & Sour Chicken (Our Favorite Version)

*Serves 2–3*

## Ingredients

- 1 lb chicken breast, cut into bite-size chunks
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon oil (for cooking)
- Or deep fry battered chicken

## For the Sauce

- 1 cup pineapple juice (or use juice from a 20 oz can of pineapple)
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons chicken bouillon powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/4 cup water

## Directions

1. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Sauté in a skillet with oil over medium heat until cooked through and golden. Set aside.
2. In a small saucepan, combine pineapple juice, brown sugar, soy sauce, bouillon, salt, ginger, and garlic powder.
3. In a separate bowl, mix cornstarch and water until smooth, then stir into the sauce.
4. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring often, until thick and glossy.
5. Pour sauce over cooked chicken and stir to coat. Heat gently together for 1–2 minutes.

## Notes

This version skips deep frying but still delivers that sweet, tangy flavor everyone loves. You can also add chunks of canned pineapple, bell peppers, or onions to stretch the dish. Serve with rice and a side of egg rolls for a takeout-style dinner at home.

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# Taco Haystacks

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1/2 cup seasoned taco meat
- 1/4 cup refried beans
- 1/4 cup salsa
- 1/4 cup shredded cheese
- 2 tablespoons canned cheddar cheese sauce, heated
- 1/2 cup shredded lettuce
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons diced tomato
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- Small handful crushed Doritos or tortilla chips

## Directions

Let each person build their own haystack, layering rice on the bottom and adding any toppings they like.

## Notes

This flexible meal is a family favorite and works great with chicken or ground beef. Use what you have—anything you'd put in a taco can go into a haystack.

## **Freezer Meat Prep: A Simple Way to Save Time, Money, and Stress**

One of the easiest ways to simplify dinner is by prepping meat in advance. Whether you're shaping meatballs, forming burger patties, or cooking a big batch of ground beef or chicken, having ready-to-use portions in your freezer makes a world of difference. It saves money by letting you buy meat in bulk, saves time on busy nights, and tastes far better than drive-thru food or boxed meals. When you've got seasoned meat or pre-cooked portions already done, all that's left is to reheat, serve, and enjoy a homemade meal with very little effort. In the pages that follow, you'll find my favorite make-ahead meat basics—easy to prep, easy to freeze, and delicious every time.

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# Bulk Ground Beef Prep

*Yields about 6–8 portions per 3 lbs meat*

## Ingredients

- 1½ lbs ground beef
- 1½ lbs ground turkey
- 1 cup diced onion
- 1/2 cup diced bell pepper (optional)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder

## Directions

1. In a large skillet or soup pot, combine ground beef and ground turkey.
2. Add diced onion, pepper, and seasonings. Cook over medium heat, breaking it up as it browns.
3. Cook until no longer pink and most of the liquid has evaporated.
4. Let cool completely.
5. Portion into quart-size freezer bags, flattening them out for quick freezing and easy stacking. Label and date each bag.

## Storage & Tips

- Freeze for up to 3 months.
- Thaws quickly in the fridge or can be reheated straight from frozen in a skillet.
- Use in tacos, spaghetti, casseroles, chili, sloppy joes, or soup.

## Notes

Mixing ground turkey with ground beef cuts down the strong “beefy” taste, stretches your meat budget, and still tastes delicious. Bulk cooking like this means you’re halfway to dinner all month long—and the flavor is even better with the onions and seasoning already done.

# Italian Meatballs

*Serves 4 (Makes about 16 meatballs)*

## Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/3 cup seasoned bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning

## Directions

1. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients. Mix gently until just combined—do not overwork.
2. Roll mixture into 1½-inch balls and place on a parchment-lined cookie sheet.
3. Flash freeze uncovered for 1 hour. Once firm, transfer to a freezer bag and label.
4. When ready to cook, bake at 375°F for 20–25 minutes from frozen, or until fully cooked.
5. Serve with marinara sauce, spaghetti, or in a sub roll with melted mozzarella.

## Notes

These freeze beautifully and you can take out only what you need. Try adding chopped parsley or a dash of crushed red pepper for extra flavor.



# Cheese-Stuffed Meatballs

*Serves 4 (Makes about 12 stuffed meatballs)*

## Ingredients

- Base Italian Meatball mixture (above)
- 4 oz block mozzarella or cheddar, cut into small cubes

## Directions

1. Form a small amount of meatball mixture in your hand. Press a cheese cube into the center and seal completely.
2. Repeat with remaining mixture. Place on a parchment-lined tray and flash freeze.
3. Store in a freezer bag. Bake from frozen at 375°F for 25–30 minutes, or until meat is cooked through and cheese is melted inside.

## Notes

Serve with marinara or garlic butter for dipping. These also make a great appetizer.

# Porcupine Meatballs

*Serves 4 (Makes about 14 small meatballs)*

## Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 cup uncooked white rice
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup onion, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

## For Cooking

- 1/2 cup tomato sauce
- 1 cup chicken broth

## Directions

1. Mix all meatball ingredients in a bowl until just combined.
2. Roll into small balls and place on a tray to flash freeze. Transfer to freezer bags once firm.
3. To cook: place frozen meatballs in a baking dish. Pour tomato sauce and broth over top. Cover and bake at 350°F for 1 hour, or until rice is tender and meat is cooked through.

## Notes

These are a nostalgic, budget-friendly favorite. You can also cook them in a slow cooker on low for 4–5 hours.

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# Hamburger Patties

*Makes 4 patties (Serves 4)*

## Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef (80/20 is ideal for juicy burgers)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- Optional: 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder or onion powder

## Directions

1. In a bowl, gently mix ground beef with seasonings. Do not overwork the meat.
2. Divide mixture into 4 equal portions and shape into flat patties, about 1/2 inch thick.
3. Press a slight indent into the center of each patty with your thumb (this helps prevent puffing up during cooking).
4. Place patties on a parchment-lined baking sheet and flash freeze for 1–2 hours.
5. Once firm, stack with parchment between each patty and store in a freezer bag.

## To Cook from Frozen

- Grill or pan-fry over medium heat for 6–7 minutes per side, or until fully cooked through (internal temp: 160°F).
- Add cheese during the last minute if desired.

## Notes

You can season simply or mix in extras like Worcestershire, minced onion, or shredded cheese for different flavors. These patties work well for burgers, patty melts, or chopped into salads and bowls.

# Bulk Chicken Breast Prep (Fajita Style)

*Makes enough for 4–6 meals depending on use*

## Ingredients

- 3–4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (or lime juice)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- Optional: pinch of cumin or red pepper flakes for extra flavor

## Directions

1. Slice each chicken breast in half lengthwise to create thinner pieces. This helps them cook faster and more evenly.
2. Place the chicken in a large bowl or zipper bag. Add oil, lemon juice, and all seasonings. Mix well to coat.
3. Let marinate at least 30 minutes, or refrigerate for a few hours for deeper flavor.
4. Grill or pan fry the chicken in batches over medium-high heat until fully cooked and golden. Let rest for 10 minutes.
5. Slice into thin strips. Cool completely before storing.
6. Portion into freezer bags or containers and label. Flatten bags for easy freezing and faster thawing.

## Storage & Use

- **Freeze for up to 3 months.**
- **Reheat gently in a skillet or microwave.**
- **Use for quick fajitas, wraps, salads, rice bowls, or quesadillas.**

## Notes

This simple prep turns plain chicken into flavorful, ready-to-go meat for all kinds of meals. Cooking in bulk and storing the strips saves you time, dishes, and stress during busy weeks.

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# Ground Chicken Prep

*Makes about 1 lb*

## Ingredients

- 1 large boneless, skinless chicken breast (or more, as needed)

## Directions

1. Trim the chicken breast and remove the small white tendon (the tough “vein-like” strip you’ll often find in the tender portion). This helps avoid tough, chewy bits.
2. Cut the breast into chunks and place in a food processor.
3. Pulse in short bursts until finely ground. Don’t over-process—it should look like store-bought ground meat, not a paste.
4. Use immediately, or divide into portions, label, and freeze.

## Freezer Tips

- Store in freezer-safe bags, flatten for easy stacking.
- Freeze raw ground chicken for up to 3 months.
- Thaw in fridge overnight before using in recipes.

## Notes

Homemade ground chicken is often fresher and more budget-friendly than store-bought. You control the texture and quality, and it’s perfect for meatballs, patties, casseroles, or tacos. Season it the same way you would ground beef or turkey—it takes on flavor well and cooks quickly.

# Chicken Strips or Cubes for Freezer Meals

*Makes several portions depending on quantity prepped*

## Ingredients

- Boneless, skinless chicken breasts

## Directions

1. Trim chicken breasts and remove any fat or tough pieces.
2. Cut into strips for recipes like air fryer chicken tenders, stir-fry, or fajitas.
3. Cut into bite-size cubes for casseroles, skillet meals, or baked chicken bites.
4. Place pieces in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet and flash freeze for 1–2 hours.
5. Once firm, transfer to labeled freezer bags or containers. Store for up to 3 months.

## Uses

- Breaded chicken strips (baked or air fried)
- Stir-fry or teriyaki bowls
- Baked ranch or BBQ chicken bites
- Chicken soups or casseroles
- Skewers or kabobs

## Notes

Prepping chicken like this in advance saves a lot of time during busy weeks. You can season or marinate before freezing if you know what you plan to make—or keep it plain so it works for anything. Frozen pieces can be cooked from frozen or thawed first, depending on the recipe.

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# Prepped Kielbasa with Onions & Peppers

*Makes 3–4 portions depending on quantity used*

## Ingredients

- 1–2 packages kielbasa (any variety)
- 1–2 bell peppers, sliced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 tablespoon oil (for cooking)

## Directions

1. Slice kielbasa into coins or half-moons.
2. In a skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté kielbasa with peppers and onions until browned and vegetables are tender.
3. Let cool completely.
4. Divide into freezer bags, flatten, and label. Freeze for up to 3 months.

## Uses

- Serve over rice or noodles
- Toss into scrambled eggs or breakfast hash
- Stuff into hoagie rolls with melted cheese
- Add to pasta, skillet meals, or sheet pan dinners

## Notes

Prepping kielbasa like this ahead of time gives you a flavorful head start for easy dinners. Just reheat and serve—no chopping or extra dishes needed on busy nights. You can also freeze the mixture in single portions for lunches.

# Beef Roast Cubes (Steak Bites & Burrito Bowl Meat)

*Makes 4–6 portions depending on size of roast*

## Ingredients

- 1 boneless beef roast (such as London broil, top round, or sirloin)
- Optional: salt, pepper, garlic powder, oil, or marinade for flavoring

## Directions

1. Place the roast on a cutting board and trim any excess fat.
2. Using a very sharp knife, slice the meat into 1-inch thick strips, then cut crosswise into bite-size cubes.
3. Use immediately or divide into freezer bags and freeze flat for up to 3 months.
4. To cook: season as desired and sauté in a hot skillet with oil until browned and tender, or marinate ahead of time and grill or roast.

## Uses

- Serve as steak bites with potatoes or vegetables
- Toss into burrito bowls with rice, beans, and toppings
- Simmer with gravy for easy beef tips
- Thread onto skewers for quick kabobs

## Notes

Buying a roast and cutting it yourself can save money and give you several meals' worth of meat. Flash freeze the cubes on a baking sheet first if you want to pull out just a few at a time later.

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## Real-Life Meals for One or Two

Dinner doesn't need to be fancy—it just needs to be filling, warm, and easy to make when you're tired. With a little planning, you can prep once and eat well all week. These dinner ideas are flexible, frugal, and family-friendly. Most of them use ingredients you likely already have in your kitchen, or things you can batch-prepare on a quiet day.

### Dinner Basics to Keep on Hand

A few go-to items make weeknight dinners easier and quicker:

- **Ground beef or turkey** – For tacos, pasta, casseroles, or skillet meals.
- **Chicken (cooked or raw)** – Bakes, stir-fries, or shredded for bowls.
- **Pasta & Rice** – Stretch meals, serve as a base, or make a quick side.
- **Tortillas or Buns** – Great for wraps, tacos, or sandwiches.
- **Cheese** – Melts onto everything from pasta to potatoes.
- **Frozen Veggies** – Easy to roast, steam, or stir into anything.
- **Potatoes** – For mashing, baking, roasting, or slicing into casseroles.
- **Canned Tomatoes or Sauce** – Use in soups, pasta, or casseroles.
- **Simple Seasonings** – Salt, pepper, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, taco seasoning, ranch mix.

# Meal Prep Tips for a Week of Easy Dinners

Spend an hour or two early in the week doing just a few things, and dinner will come together fast:

- Cook a big batch of ground beef or shredded chicken.
  - Boil rice or pasta to keep in the fridge.
  - Roast a tray of potatoes or veggies to reheat later.
  - Slice onions or peppers for quick stir-fries or fajitas.
  - Freeze leftover portions from any big recipe for a future night.
  - Double a casserole and freeze half for later.
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## 7-Day Dinner Plan

### Real Food for One or Two

Day	Dinner	Prep Notes
Monday	Spaghetti with Ground Beef	Brown meat ahead and mix with sauce. Serve with garlic toast.
Tuesday	Chicken Fajitas + Rice	Use prepped chicken strips and sauté with onions and peppers.
Wednesday	Hamburger Patties + Roasted Veggies	Use frozen patties or make fresh. Roast carrots or potatoes.
Thursday	Taco Rice Bowls	Use seasoned meat, rice, cheese, salsa, and beans. Quick to assemble.
Friday	Baked Macaroni & Cheese + Steamed Veggies	Make a small batch of stovetop mac, then bake with cheese topping.
Saturday	Kielbasa Stir-Fry + Noodles or Rice	Use prepped kielbasa and veggies. Stir-fry and serve over rice or noodles.
Sunday	Soup Night + Biscuits or Toast	Use leftovers or a freezer meal soup. Add bread or a salad.

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## Dinner Plan: Shopping List

### Pantry

- Rice
- Pasta (macaroni and spaghetti)
- Tortillas
- Canned diced tomatoes or tomato sauce
- Canned beans (pinto, black, or chili beans)
- Garlic powder, onion powder, Italian seasoning, taco seasoning
- Cooking oil
- Salsa or hot sauce

### Protein

- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 2–3 chicken breasts or thighs
- 1 package kielbasa
- 4 hamburger patties (or ingredients to make your own)
- Shredded cheese (cheddar or mozzarella)

### Dairy

- Milk
- Butter
- Eggs (for binding patties or baking)
- Cream cheese or sour cream (optional)

### Produce

- Bell peppers
- Onions
- Garlic
- Carrots or baby carrots
- Potatoes
- Bag of salad mix (optional)

### Optional Freezer Items

- Frozen broccoli or mixed vegetables
- Frozen biscuits or dinner rolls
- Prepped ground beef or shredded chicken

## Bonus Recipes

After I had written most of this cookbook, the requests kept rolling in—especially from my kids! These recipes didn't quite fit into the earlier chapters, but they're too good to leave out.. This section is a mix of fun meals, favorite sides, and comfort dishes that didn't have a home until now. I hope they bring as much joy to your table as they do to ours.

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# Italian Pasta Salad

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked corkscrew (rotini) pasta
- 1/4 cup diced salami
- 1/4 cup diced mozzarella (or use mini mozzarella balls, halved)
- 2 tablespoons diced red or green bell pepper (optional)
- 2 tablespoons sliced black olives (optional)
- 1 tablespoon chopped red onion (optional)
- 1/4 cup Italian dressing (zesty style works well)
- 1/2 teaspoon Salad Supreme seasoning

## Directions

1. Cook pasta in salted water according to package directions. Drain and rinse under cold water to cool.
2. In a medium bowl, combine pasta, salami, mozzarella, and any optional add-ins.
3. Pour in Italian dressing and sprinkle with Salad Supreme. Toss well to coat.
4. Chill for at least 30 minutes before serving for best flavor.

## Notes

This is one of those recipes where the longer it sits, the better it tastes. Add cherry tomatoes, banana peppers, or cucumbers if your kids like extra crunch. Great for lunchboxes or a quick side dish.

# How to Cook Spaghetti Squash

*Makes about 2 servings per squash half*

## Ingredients

- 1 medium spaghetti squash
- Olive oil
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder
- Optional: pesto or Alfredo sauce for serving

## Oven Method

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Slice squash in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds.
3. Drizzle with a little olive oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and garlic powder.
4. Place cut-side down on a baking sheet lined with parchment.
5. Roast for 35–45 minutes, or until the flesh is tender and strands easily with a fork.
6. Let cool slightly, then scrape out the strands with a fork.

## Microwave Method

1. Pierce whole squash a few times with a knife. Microwave on high for 5 minutes.
2. Carefully cut in half (it will be hot). Scoop out seeds.
3. Place halves cut-side down in a microwave-safe dish with a little water.
4. Microwave for another 5–7 minutes, until tender. Scrape into strands with a fork.

## To Serve

Toss cooked squash with a pinch of salt, pepper, and garlic powder—or dress it up with a spoonful of pesto or a splash of Alfredo sauce for an easy, flavorful side.

## Notes

This makes a great low-carb substitute for pasta or a simple veggie side. You can prep squash ahead, refrigerate the strands, and reheat as needed.

---

# Mashed Potatoes

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 medium yellow potatoes (such as Yukon Gold), peeled and diced
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup milk (add more if needed)
- Salt and pepper, to taste

## Directions

1. Place diced potatoes in a pot and cover with cold water. Add a pinch of salt.
2. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until potatoes are fork-tender, about 12–15 minutes.
3. Drain and return to the pot. Add butter, milk, salt, and pepper.
4. Mash until smooth and creamy. Add more milk if needed to reach desired consistency.

## Notes

Yellow potatoes like Yukon Golds make extra creamy, buttery mashed potatoes with better natural flavor than russets. You can leave the skins on if you prefer a rustic texture.



# KFC-Style Brown Gravy

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon beef bouillon powder
- 1/2 teaspoon chicken bouillon powder
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup water
- Black pepper, to taste

## Directions

1. In a small saucepan, melt butter over medium heat.
2. Whisk in flour and cook for 1–2 minutes, stirring constantly, until it forms a golden brown roux.
3. Slowly whisk in water until smooth.
4. Stir in both bouillon powders and onion powder.
5. Simmer for 2–3 minutes, whisking often, until thickened.
6. Season with black pepper to taste.

## Notes

This gravy tastes surprisingly close to the real thing and comes together in minutes. You can double or triple it for family-size servings. Serve over mashed potatoes, meatballs, chicken, or fries.

---

# Simple White Bread (One Loaf)

*Makes 1 loaf*

## Ingredients

- 1 1/2 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon oil (vegetable or olive oil)
- 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 cups bread flour

## Directions

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine warm water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until foamy.
2. Stir in salt and oil. Add flour gradually, mixing until a soft dough forms.
3. Turn out onto a floured surface and knead for 6–8 minutes until smooth and elastic.
4. Place in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise in a warm spot for about 1 hour or until doubled in size.
5. Punch down dough and shape into a loaf. Place into a greased 8x4-inch loaf pan.
6. Cover and let rise again for 30–40 minutes, or until dough rises about 1 inch above the pan.
7. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes, or until golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped.
8. Remove from pan and cool on a wire rack. Brush with butter if desired.

## Notes

This makes a soft, sandwich-style loaf with a tender crumb. Great toasted with butter or served warm with soup.

# Dinner Curry

*Serves 2*

## Ingredients

- 1 can (13.5 oz) coconut cream or full-fat coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons green curry paste
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons sweet chili sauce
- 1 teaspoon chicken bouillon powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1/2 cup frozen peas and carrots
- Cooked rice, for serving

## Directions

1. In a saucepan over medium heat, add a small drizzle of oil and sauté garlic until fragrant (about 30 seconds).
2. Stir in green curry paste and curry powder; cook for 1 minute to bring out the flavor.
3. Pour in coconut cream and whisk until smooth.
4. Add sweet chili sauce, bouillon, sugar, salt, and pepper.
5. Stir in chickpeas and peas and carrots. Simmer on low for 10–15 minutes until thickened and heated through.
6. Serve warm over cooked rice.

## Notes

This dish comes together quickly and is full of flavor without needing meat. You can add cooked chicken, tofu, or shrimp if desired. Keeps well in the fridge and gets even better the next day.

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# Baked Potatoes + Topping Ideas

*Serves 2*

## How to Bake Potatoes

- 2 medium russet potatoes
- Olive oil and salt (optional)

## Oven Method

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Scrub potatoes clean and pat dry. Pierce each potato a few times with a fork.
3. Rub lightly with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, if desired.
4. Place directly on the oven rack or on a baking sheet. Bake for 45–60 minutes, until soft when squeezed with a towel or tongs.

## Microwave Method

1. Scrub and pierce potatoes as above.
2. Microwave on high for 5 minutes. Flip, then cook 4–5 more minutes or until soft.
3. Let rest a couple minutes before cutting.

## Topping Ideas

### Taco Potato

- Leftover taco meat or seasoned ground beef
- Shredded cheese
- Sour cream
- Salsa or diced tomatoes
- Green onions or avocado (optional)

### Chili Cheese Potato

- Warmed canned chili or chili beans
- Shredded cheddar or pepper jack
- Sour cream
- Crushed tortilla chips (optional)

## **Cheesy Broccoli Potato**

- Steamed broccoli
- Warm cheese sauce or shredded cheddar
- Salt and pepper to taste

## **Simple Butter & Cheese**

- Butter, shredded cheese, and a sprinkle of salt
- Add bacon bits or green onions if desired

## **Loaded Breakfast Potato**

- Scrambled eggs
- Crumbled bacon or sausage
- Cheese and a drizzle of hot sauce



# Homemade Chocolate Syrup

Perfect for drizzling over ice cream, stirring into milk, or adding to coffee!

## Ingredients

- 1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 cups sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. In a saucepan, whisk together the cocoa, sugar, salt, and water over medium heat.
2. Bring to a gentle boil, stirring constantly. Let simmer for 3–5 minutes until slightly thickened.
3. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.
4. Let cool, then pour into a jar or bottle.
5. Store in the refrigerator for up to a month.

# Grinder Pasta Salad for Two

## Ingredients:

### For the Salad:

- 2 cups cooked rotini pasta (about 4 oz dry)
- 1/3 cup chopped cooked chicken
- 1/4 cup chopped ham
- 1/4 cup chopped salami
- 1/4 cup chopped provolone cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped lettuce
- 3 tablespoons chopped pickles
- 3 tablespoons chopped mild pepper rings
- 1/4 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered and lightly salted
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
- Salt and black pepper to taste

### Homemade Grinder Dressing

- 2 tablespoons Miracle Whip (or mayo)
- 1 teaspoon yellow mustard
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- Pinch of sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- (Optional: 1 teaspoon pickle juice or pepper ring brine)

## Directions:

**Cook the pasta:** Boil rotini in salted water until tender. Drain and rinse under cold water. Let it cool.

**Make the dressing:** In a small bowl, whisk together Miracle Whip, mustard, vinegar, olive oil, garlic powder, oregano, sugar, and a pinch of salt and pepper.

**Toss it together:** In a medium bowl, combine cooled pasta with chopped meats, cheese, lettuce, veggies, and pickles. Pour over the dressing and toss gently to coat.

**Chill and serve:** Refrigerate for 30 minutes if you have time. Stir again before serving.

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# Banana Pudding Cups (Makes 2 jars)

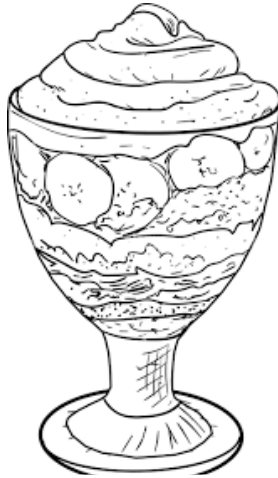
*This is creamy, dreamy, and layered with bananas and vanilla wafers—just like Grandma’s banana pudding, only mini.*

## Ingredients:

- 1 cup prepared vanilla pudding (from a mix or homemade)
- 1 banana, sliced
- 6–8 vanilla wafers
- Whipped cream, for topping

## Directions:

1. In small jars, layer pudding, banana slices, and vanilla wafers.
2. Repeat layers and top with whipped cream.
3. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.



# Buckeye Balls (Small Batch – Makes 10)

*Peanut butter and chocolate, rolled into the perfect bite. These are great to make ahead and store in the fridge or freezer.*

## Ingredients:

- ½ cup creamy peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon softened butter
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- ½ cup chocolate chips
- 1 teaspoon coconut oil or shortening (for melting)

## Directions:

1. Mix peanut butter, butter, and powdered sugar until smooth.
  2. Roll into 1-inch balls and place on a lined plate. Freeze for 20 minutes.
  3. Melt chocolate and coconut oil together.
  4. Dip each ball halfway into the chocolate and place back on the plate. Chill until firm.
-

## Easy Chocolate Mug Cake (1 Serving)

*A cake in a mug—because sometimes you just want dessert and you want it fast. This little treat is ready in under five minutes and uses ingredients you probably already have in the pantry.*

### Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- 3 tablespoons milk
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon vanilla extract
- Optional: chocolate chips or a scoop of peanut butter

### Directions:

1. In a microwave-safe mug, mix the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder, and salt.
2. Add milk, oil, and vanilla. Stir until smooth.
3. Stir in a few chocolate chips or a spoonful of peanut butter if you want.
4. Microwave on high for 60–70 seconds. The cake should look puffed up but slightly gooey in the middle.
5. Let cool for a minute or two and eat right from the mug.

## Easy S'mores Dip (Serves 2–3)

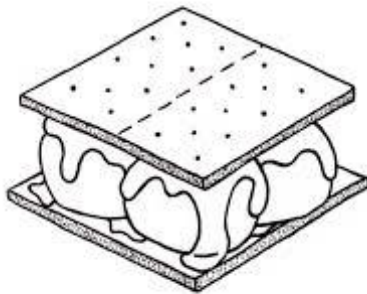
*No campfire needed. This gooey treat is made in the oven and scooped up with graham crackers.*

### Ingredients:

- ½ cup chocolate chips
- 6–8 mini marshmallows or 3–4 large
- Graham crackers for dipping

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. In a small baking dish or oven-safe skillet, sprinkle chocolate chips.
3. Top with marshmallows.
4. Bake for 7–9 minutes, or until melted and golden brown.
5. Serve warm with graham crackers.



## Edible Cookie Dough Bites (Makes 6–8 small balls)

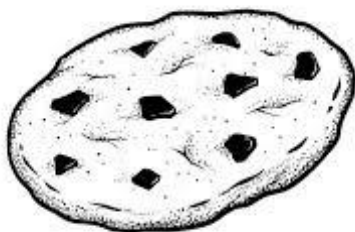
*No eggs, no baking, just sweet little bites that feel like sneaking cookie dough straight from the bowl.*

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- 2 tablespoons milk
- ½ cup flour (heat-treat in microwave 1 min)
- Pinch of salt
- 2 tablespoons chocolate chips or sprinkles

### Directions:

1. Stir together butter and sugar until smooth.
2. Add vanilla and milk. Mix in flour, salt, and chips.
3. Roll into small balls. Chill for 15 minutes before serving.



# Homemade Chocolate Pudding

## Ingredients:

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- Pinch of salt
- 1½ cups milk (whole milk works best)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions:

1. In a medium saucepan (off heat), stir together sugar, cocoa powder, cornstarch, and salt.
  2. Slowly whisk in cold milk until smooth—no lumps.
  3. Place over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until it thickens and begins to bubble gently.
  4. As soon as it thickens, remove from heat. Stir in butter and vanilla.
  5. Let cool slightly, then pour into small jars or bowls.
  6. Chill in the fridge or enjoy warm! Stir occasionally while cooling to prevent a skin on top.
-

## No-Bake Chocolate Cookie Crust

*This makes enough for a 6-inch pie pan or several mini desserts in jars.*

### Ingredients:

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup chocolate cookie crumbs (from about 8 chocolate sandwich cookies or graham crackers)
- 2 tablespoons melted butter

### Directions:

1. Crush the cookies until fine (a rolling pin and zip-top bag work well).
2. Stir in melted butter until combined.
3. Press into the bottom of a 6-inch pie plate or the base of 4–6 small jars.
4. Chill for 30 minutes before filling.

## Ice Cream Sandwiches (Makes 4 small sandwiches)

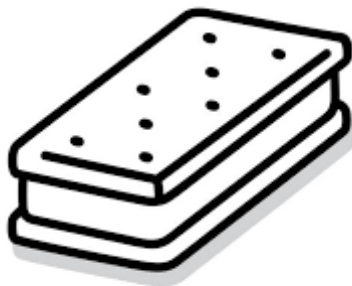
*Homemade, small, and simple—this is a fun treat to stash in the freezer for hot afternoons or a dessert surprise.*

### Ingredients:

- 8 small soft cookies (chocolate chip or sugar cookies work great)
- 1 cup vanilla ice cream (or any flavor)

### Directions:

1. Let the ice cream soften slightly.
2. Scoop about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup onto the flat side of one cookie and top with another.
3. Gently press together and smooth the edges.
4. Roll in sprinkles or mini chocolate chips if you want.
5. Freeze for 30 minutes before eating, or wrap and store in the freezer.



## Mini Fruit Crisps (Makes 2 servings)

*Warm, sweet, and topped with a crunchy oat crumble—this is a cozy dessert that works with whatever fruit you have on hand.*

### Ingredients:

#### Fruit Base:

- 1 heaping cup chopped apples, berries, peaches, or any fruit
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon cornstarch
- Pinch of cinnamon

#### Crisp Topping:

- 2 tablespoons oats
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- Pinch of salt

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a bowl, mix the chopped fruit with sugar, cornstarch, and cinnamon. Divide between 2 ramekins or small baking dishes.
3. In another bowl, mix oats, flour, sugar, butter, and salt with your fingers until crumbly. Sprinkle over the fruit.
4. Bake for 25–30 minutes or until golden and bubbly. Let cool slightly before serving.

## Mini No-Bake Cheesecakes (Small Batch)

*Creamy, sweet, and just the right size. These no-bake cheesecakes are made in little jars or muffin tins, perfect for a fun afternoon dessert or a treat to share with a friend. No oven needed, no stress involved.*

### Ingredients (Makes 4 mini cheesecakes):

#### **Crust:**

- ½ cup graham cracker crumbs (about 4 crackers)
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 teaspoon sugar

#### **Filling:**

- 4 oz cream cheese (½ block), softened
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup whipped topping (like Cool Whip or homemade)

### Directions:

1. **Make the crust:** Stir graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and melted butter together. Press into the bottom of 4 small jars, ramekins, or a lined muffin tin. Use the back of a spoon to press it down firmly.
  2. **Make the filling:** In a bowl, mix the softened cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Fold in the whipped topping until fluffy and combined.
  3. **Assemble:** Spoon the filling over the crusts. Smooth the tops. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.
  4. **Top it off:** Add fresh berries, chocolate syrup, mini chocolate chips, or sprinkles—whatever sounds good!
-

## Mini S'mores Cups (Makes 6 mini muffin size)

*Just like a campfire s'more, but less sticky and way more adorable.*

### Ingredients:

- 3 graham crackers, crushed (about ½ cup)
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 6 squares of chocolate or chocolate chips
- 6 mini marshmallows

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Mix graham crumbs, sugar, and butter. Press into a greased mini muffin pan.
3. Bake crusts for 5 minutes.
4. Add a piece of chocolate and a marshmallow on each. Return to oven for 3–5 more minutes, until melty and golden.
5. Let cool slightly before removing from the pan.

## Mom's Favorite Key Lime Pie (Small Batch)

*Right now, this may just be Mom's favorite—but one day, your taste buds might surprise you! This pie is creamy, tart, and just the right kind of sweet. No green food coloring, no fuss. Just real-deal flavor with Nellie & Joe's key lime juice (because that's the only kind Mom uses).*

### For the Crust:

#### Graham Cracker Nut Crust (Mini Version)

You can use any nuts you like here—macadamia, pecan, walnut, or cashew. Just use what's on hand and go with your favorites.

- 5–6 full graham cracker sheets (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup crumbs)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup roasted salted nuts (macadamia, pecan, walnut, or cashew)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- $2\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons melted butter

### Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a food processor (or zip bag with a rolling pin), crush graham crackers and nuts into fine crumbs. Stir in sugar and melted butter until the mixture looks like damp sand. Press into the bottom and slightly up the sides of a **6-inch pie pan** or **4 small jars**. Use the back of a spoon or measuring cup to press gently but firmly. Bake for 8 minutes. Remove from the oven but leave it on.

### For the Filling:

- 1 can (14 oz) sweetened condensed milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Nellie & Joe's key lime juice (only this brand—it matters!)
- 2 egg yolks

### Instructions:

In a bowl, whisk together sweetened condensed milk, key lime juice, and egg yolks until smooth and creamy. No lime zest needed—this is how Mom makes it.

Pour the filling into the warm crust. Bake for 15–18 minutes, until the center is just barely jiggly.

Cool completely, then refrigerate for at least 1 hour (overnight is even better).

### Serve With:

Whipped cream, lime slices, a sprinkle of crushed nuts, or just plain—it's delicious any way.

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## Small-Batch Cereal Treat Bars (Makes 6 squares)

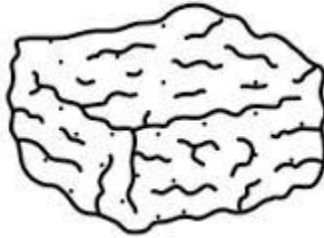
*This one is so easy, kids can make it almost entirely on their own. Use whatever cereal you like—Rice Krispies, Fruity Pebbles, or Cocoa Pebbles are all great.*

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups mini marshmallows
- 3 cups crispy cereal

### Directions:

1. In a saucepan, melt the butter over low heat.
2. Add marshmallows and stir until melted.
3. Remove from heat and stir in cereal until fully coated.
4. Press into a greased 8x4 loaf pan or 6-inch pan. Use buttered hands or wax paper to press flat.
5. Let cool for 30 minutes, then cut into squares.



# Small Batch Chocolate Chip Cookies

## Ingredients (Makes 8–10 cookies):

- ¾ cup + 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon cornstarch
- Pinch of salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled 5 minutes
- 6 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 egg yolk + ½ of a whole egg (or 1 small egg total if easier)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup chocolate chips or chunks

## Directions:

1. **Mix the dry ingredients:** In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, cornstarch, and salt. Set aside.
  2. **Whisk the wet ingredients:** In a separate bowl, whisk the melted butter with the brown sugar and granulated sugar until smooth. Add in the egg + yolk (or one small egg) and vanilla. Whisk until fully combined.
  3. **Combine and fold in chips:** Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and stir gently with a spoon or spatula. The dough will be soft and glossy. Fold in the chocolate chips. It may seem a bit loose at first—it thickens in the fridge.
  4. **Chill the dough:** Cover and refrigerate the dough for at least **2 hours** (or overnight if you're prepping ahead). If chilled longer than 4 hours, let it sit at room temp for 10–15 minutes before scooping.
  5. **Shape and bake:** Preheat oven to **325°F**. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Scoop about **2 tablespoons** of dough per cookie and roll into balls. Stack them a bit taller (like a mini cylinder) to keep them thick.
  6. **Bake:** Bake for **12–13 minutes**, or until the edges are just golden. The centers will still look soft—don't overbake. Let cool on the pan for 10 minutes, then move to a rack.
  7. **Optional but fun:** While they're still warm, press a few extra chocolate chips on top so they look bakery-style.
-

# Small-Batch Fudgy Brownies

## Ingredients (for a 6-inch square or small loaf pan):

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup + 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder (any brand is fine)
- Pinch of salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 large egg
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup + 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chocolate chips (or peanut butter chips if you have them!)

## Directions:

1. **Preheat oven** to 325°F. Line a **6-inch square pan** or small loaf pan with parchment, leaving a little overhang so you can lift the brownies out later.
2. **Melt the base:** In a large microwave-safe bowl, melt the butter, sugar, cocoa powder, and salt in 30-second bursts, stirring in between, until smooth. It may look a little gritty—don't worry.
3. Let the mixture cool a few minutes so it's not piping hot.
4. **Stir in vanilla and egg:** Mix in the vanilla, then add the egg and stir well. The batter should look thick and shiny.
5. **Add the flour:** Stir in the flour just until no streaks remain. Don't overmix—just enough to combine.
6. **Fold in the chips:** Gently mix in most of the chocolate or peanut butter chips, saving a few to sprinkle on top.
7. **Bake:** Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Smooth the top and sprinkle with the extra chips. Bake for **23–27 minutes**, or until a toothpick comes out with a few moist crumbs.
8. **Cool completely** in the pan before slicing. The flavor gets even better the next day (if you can wait that long).

# Small Batch Puppy Chow (Muddy Buddies)

*Sweet, crunchy, chocolatey, and coated in powdered sugar—just the way we like it. This small batch makes just enough for a treat without overdoing it. And here's a secret from Mom: she mixes rice and corn cereal together for the perfect texture. It's a little thing, but it makes a big difference!*

## Ingredients (Makes about 3–4 cups):

- 1½ cups crispy cereal (Mom uses a mix of rice and corn Chex)
- ¼ cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup powdered sugar (add more if you like it extra coated)

## Directions:

1. **Melt the chocolate mix:** In a small microwave-safe bowl, combine chocolate chips, peanut butter, and butter. Microwave in 20–30 second intervals, stirring each time, until smooth and melted.
  2. Stir in the vanilla.
  3. **Coat the cereal:** Place the cereal in a mixing bowl. Pour the warm chocolate mixture over and stir gently until all the pieces are coated. Don't crush the cereal—just fold it gently.
  4. **Sugar it up:** Add the coated cereal
-

# Small Strawberry Pretzel Dessert

## For the Pretzel Crust (6-inch square pan or 4 small jars):

- 1 cup crushed pretzels (about 2–2½ handfuls)
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ¼ cup (4 tablespoons) unsalted butter, melted

## Cream Cheese Layer:

- 4 oz cream cheese (½ block), softened
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup whipped topping (like Cool Whip or homemade whipped cream)

## Strawberry Topping:

- ½ (3 oz) box strawberry gelatin (Jello)
- ¾ cup boiling water
- ½ cup cold water
- 1 heaping cup sliced fresh strawberries

## Instructions:

1. **Make the crust:** Preheat oven to 350°F. Stir crushed pretzels, sugar, and melted butter together. Press firmly into the bottom of a greased **6-inch pan** or divide among **4 small jars**. Bake for 8–10 minutes. Cool completely.
2. **Make the cream layer:** Beat softened cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Fold in whipped topping. Spread over the cooled crust. If using jars, just spoon it gently on top. Chill while you prep the top layer.
3. **Make the strawberry topping:** Dissolve Jello powder in boiling water, then stir in cold water. Let it sit until slightly thickened (about 20–30 minutes in the fridge, stirring occasionally), then mix in sliced strawberries.
4. **Assemble:** Pour or spoon the strawberry mixture on top of the cream cheese layer. Return to the fridge and chill until fully set, at least 2 hours.

## Strawberry Shortcake Jars (Makes 2–3 jars)

*Sweet, soft, and layered with cream—these are fun to assemble and feel extra fancy in little jars.*

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup chopped strawberries
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 cup whipped cream or whipped topping
- 1 cup cubed pound cake, angel food cake, or biscuits

### Directions:

1. Mix the chopped strawberries with sugar and let sit 10 minutes.
2. In small jars or cups, layer cake cubes, strawberries, and whipped cream. Repeat layers.
3. Chill or eat right away!





## Back to the Basics

### Simple Skills Every Cook Should Know

*Because maybe no one ever taught you—and that's okay. I wanted to include this chapter just for you.*

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## Grains & Pantry Basics

*Let's start simple. These are things we use over and over again—rice, pasta, oats, and pantry staples. If you can get these down, you'll already be miles ahead.*

### How to Cook White Rice (Perfect Every Time)

I used to mess this up all the time—either mushy or crunchy. But once I learned the right method, it was a game-changer. For two people, start with 1 cup of water and ½ cup of white rice.

Bring your water to a boil, add a pinch of salt, then stir in the rice. Cover it, turn the heat to low, and set your timer for 18 minutes. Don't lift the lid! Once it's done, take it off the heat and let it sit (covered) for 5 minutes. Then fluff with a fork. You'll have light, fluffy rice every time.

### How to Cook Brown Rice

Brown rice just takes a little longer and more water. For two people, try 1¼ cups water to ½ cup rice. Same steps: boil the water, add the rice and a pinch of salt, cover and simmer on low—only this time for 40–45 minutes. Let it sit 10 minutes before serving. It's chewy and filling and great for meal prep.

### How to Boil Pasta (Without Making a Sticky Mess)

First tip: use more water than you think you need. Pasta likes to move around. Salt the water—this is your chance to flavor the noodles. Bring it to a boil, add your pasta, and give it a stir.

Set your timer for the number of minutes on the box, then check a piece before draining. It should be tender with just a little bite. Drain it, but don't rinse it unless you're using it for a cold dish.

### How to Cook Instant Rice or Pasta

Sometimes life is busy and you need something quick. And that's okay. Follow the directions on the box or bag—just don't walk away from it. Keep an eye on it, stir occasionally, and be careful not to overcook. You can always add a little butter or seasoning to make it taste homemade.

## **How to Cook Oatmeal (The Good Old Way)**

We grew up on stovetop oats. It's ½ cup oats to 1 cup water or milk. Bring the liquid to a simmer, stir in oats, and cook 4–5 minutes, stirring often. Add cinnamon, brown sugar, or berries at the end.

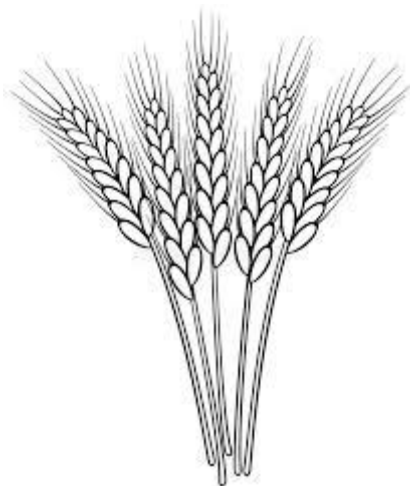
Microwave version? Same ingredients, just cook in a large bowl (so it doesn't bubble over) and stir every 30 seconds until thickened.

## **How to Use Pasta Water to Make Sauce Better**

This is one of those tips I wish someone told me earlier. Before you drain your pasta, scoop out ¼ cup of the cooking water. That starchy water helps your sauce stick to the noodles and makes everything creamier. Just stir it into your sauce right before tossing in the pasta.

## **How to Make Mac & Cheese from Scratch**

You don't need a box! Cook about 1 cup of pasta. In a saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons butter and whisk in 2 tablespoons flour. Let it bubble for a minute. Slowly whisk in 1 cup milk and stir until thick. Add 1 cup shredded cheese and stir until melted. Toss in your pasta, add salt and pepper, and taste. It's creamy, comforting, and so easy.



## Breakfast Basics

### How to Boil an Egg (Soft, Medium, or Hard)

This seems like it should be easy, but if no one taught you, it can be a mystery. Here's the way I do it.

Place your eggs in a pot and cover with cold water. Bring the water to a boil over medium-high heat. As soon as it hits a full boil, turn off the heat, cover the pot with a lid, and set a timer.

- 6 minutes for soft yolks
- 8 minutes for medium
- 10–12 minutes for hard boiled

When the timer beeps, drain the hot water and fill the pot with cold water. Let them sit until they're cool enough to peel. If the shell is stubborn, crack it gently all over and peel under running water.

### How to Make Scrambled Eggs

This one is a comfort food for sure. For two people, crack 4 eggs into a bowl. Add a splash of milk (or cream if you want them rich), and a pinch of salt and pepper.

Whisk it all together until well mixed. In a nonstick skillet, melt a bit of butter over medium heat. Pour in your eggs and let them sit for a few seconds before you start stirring. Gently push the eggs around the pan with a spatula, letting them cook slowly.

Stop just before they look fully done—they'll finish cooking from the heat of the pan. Soft, fluffy, and perfect.

### How to Fry an Egg

There's no wrong way to fry an egg—it just depends how you like it!

Start with a nonstick skillet and a little butter or oil over medium heat. Crack your egg into the pan gently.

- **Sunny side up:** Don't touch it. Let the whites cook through and the yolk stay runny.

- **Over-easy:** Once the whites are set, flip gently and cook another 30 seconds.
- **Over-medium or over-hard:** Just cook longer after flipping, depending on how firm you want the yolk.

Add a little salt and pepper and serve however you like—on toast, in a sandwich, or beside some bacon.

## How to Make French Toast

This is a great way to use up bread that's going stale. In a shallow bowl, whisk together 2 eggs, ¼ cup milk, a sprinkle of cinnamon, and a dash of vanilla if you have it.

Dip slices of bread in the mixture, coating both sides. Cook in a buttered skillet over medium heat until golden brown on each side.

Serve with syrup, fruit, or even a dollop of jam. It's cozy, filling, and way easier than it looks.

## How to Make Pancakes from a Mix

Boxed pancake mix is just fine, especially when you're starting out. But here's the trick: **don't overmix**. Stir until the batter is *just* combined—even if it's a little lumpy.

Let it sit for five minutes before cooking. Heat your skillet or griddle, add a little butter or oil, and pour about ¼ cup batter per pancake. Flip when you see bubbles on top and cook until golden on both sides.

Serve warm with butter and syrup. Leftovers? Pop them in the freezer and reheat in the toaster.

## How to Tell If Eggs Are Still Good

Place the egg in a glass of water.

- If it sinks and lays flat on the bottom, it's fresh.
  - If it stands upright, it's older but still usable.
  - If it floats, it's no good—toss it.
-

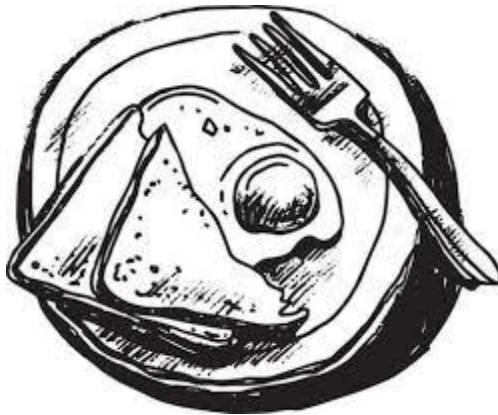
## How to Crack an Egg Without Getting Shells In It

Crack it on a flat surface—not the edge of a bowl—and pull it apart gently over a dish. If you *do* get a piece of shell in, use a larger shell piece to fish it out. It grabs the bits better than your finger or spoon.

## How to Make Hash Browns from Scratch (Or Frozen)

Fresh: Grate one medium potato and squeeze out the moisture in a clean towel. Heat oil in a skillet over medium-high heat, spread the potato in a thin layer, and press it down. Let it get crispy before flipping. Salt after cooking.

Frozen: Same idea—just cook in oil until golden brown and crisp. Don't



# Meat & Protein Basics

## How to Cook Ground Beef

This is one of the first things I taught my kids—because you can use it in so many meals. Start with a skillet over medium heat. Add your ground beef and break it up with a spatula or wooden spoon. A spurtle and meat smasher are great assets to add to your kitchen.

Let it sit for a minute or two so it gets a little browned, then stir. Keep cooking until there's no more pink. Drain the grease carefully—tilt the pan and spoon it into a jar or bowl (not down the sink!).

Once drained, season with salt and pepper or whatever your recipe calls for. That's it!

## How to Cook Chicken Without Drying It Out

Chicken is easy to overcook if you're nervous, but with a few tips, you'll get juicy results every time.

Season your chicken breasts or thighs with salt, pepper, and a little garlic powder if you like. Heat a bit of oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Place the chicken in and **don't move it**—this gives you a nice sear.

After 4–5 minutes, flip and cook the other side. Then turn the heat to low and cover it for another few minutes until it's cooked through. Let it rest 5 minutes before cutting. If it's no longer pink inside and the juices run clear, it's ready.

## How to Check If Meat Is Done

A meat thermometer is your best friend here. If you have one, insert it into the thickest part (not touching bone).

- Chicken: 165°F
  - Ground beef: 160°F
  - Pork: 145°F
  - Steak (medium): about 140–145°F
  - Turkey: 165°F
-

No thermometer? Cut into the meat—the juices should run clear, and there shouldn't be any pink (except in steak, depending how you like it).

## How to Safely Thaw Frozen Meat

Best method: move it from the freezer to the fridge the day before. It thaws slowly and safely.

Need it quicker? Seal it in a bag and place it in a bowl of **cold** water. Change the water every 30 minutes until thawed. Never thaw meat on the counter all day—it's not safe and can grow bacteria before you even cook it.

## How to Use a Meat Thermometer

Stick the probe into the thickest part of the meat, not touching bone or pan. Wait for the number to stop rising. That's your reading. Clean your thermometer before and after every use to avoid spreading germs.

## How to Freeze Cooked or Raw Meat

Let cooked meat cool down completely, then freeze in single portions or meal-size amounts. Label the bags with the name and date—you'll thank yourself later.

For raw meat, take it out of the store packaging and place it flat in freezer bags to save space. Squeeze out the air, seal, and freeze.

## How to Cook Bacon (Three Easy Ways)

- **Oven:** Line a baking sheet with foil, lay out the bacon, and bake at 400°F for 15–20 minutes. Great for batch cooking.
- **Stovetop:** Lay bacon in a cold skillet, turn on medium heat, and cook slowly, flipping as needed.
- **Microwave:** Place between layers of paper towels and cook in 30-second bursts until crispy.

## How to Cook Sausage

- **Links:** Place in a skillet with a splash of water. Cover and simmer until mostly cooked, then remove the lid and brown on all sides.

- **Patties:** Cook in a skillet over medium heat until browned on both sides and fully cooked inside.
- **Ground sausage:** Just like ground beef—brown it, break it up, and cook until no pink remains.

## How to Avoid Cross Contamination

This is big. Raw meat carries bacteria you don't want on your fresh veggies or ready-to-eat food.

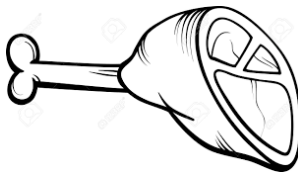
Use a separate cutting board for meat. After handling raw meat, wash your hands, knives, counters, and any dishes it touched with hot soapy water.

And never put cooked meat back on the same plate that held it raw.

## How to Use a Slow Cooker

This is one of the best tools for beginners. Add your meat, veggies, and a sauce or broth. Cover it and set on low for 6–8 hours or high for 3–4 hours.

Don't keep lifting the lid—every time you do, you lose heat and add 20–30 minutes to the cook time. Let it do its thing, and enjoy a hot meal at the end of the day.



# Vegetables & Sides Made Simple

## How to Steam or Sauté Fresh Vegetables

**To steam:** Add about an inch of water to a pot and place a steamer basket inside (or just toss the veggies in directly). Cover with a lid. Once the water is boiling, let the veggies steam until tender.

- Broccoli: about 4–5 minutes
- Carrots: about 6–7 minutes
- Green beans: 5 minutes

**To sauté:** Heat a little oil or butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add your chopped vegetables and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're tender but still have a little bite. Salt, pepper, and a sprinkle of garlic powder go a long way.

## How to Roast Vegetables

Roasting brings out all the natural sweetness. Preheat your oven to 425°F. Cut your veggies into even pieces and toss with a little olive oil, salt, and pepper. Spread them out on a baking sheet—don't crowd them or they'll steam.

Roast for about 25–35 minutes, flipping halfway through. Try this with potatoes, carrots, zucchini, broccoli, or sweet potatoes. Add garlic or Italian seasoning if you want to get fancy.

## How to Make a Simple Side Salad

You don't need a recipe for salad—just a few components. Start with washed lettuce or spinach, then add:

- Something crunchy (cucumbers, carrots, nuts)
- Something juicy (tomatoes, apples, or mandarin oranges)
- Something creamy (cheese or avocado, if you have it)

Toss it all with a dressing or just drizzle olive oil and vinegar. Keep it simple, and change it up based on what's in the fridge.

## **How to Use Canned Vegetables and Make Them Taste Better**

Drain the can first. You can rinse the veggies under cold water if you want to cut the salt. Then heat them in a pot with a little butter or olive oil. Add seasoning—try garlic powder, onion powder, or a pinch of sugar if they taste bland.

Green beans love a splash of vinegar. Corn gets sweeter with a tiny bit of honey. It doesn't take much to wake them up.

## **How to Rinse and Store Fresh Produce**

Berries and grapes should be rinsed just before eating—not before storing, or they'll go bad faster. Leafy greens should be rinsed and then dried thoroughly with paper towels or a salad spinner. Wrap them in paper towels and keep them in a container or zip bag to stay fresh.

Carrots and celery last longer if you keep them in water in the fridge.

## **How to Boil Corn on the Cob**

Shuck the corn (remove the husks and silks). Bring a big pot of water to a boil and carefully add the ears of corn. Boil for 5–7 minutes, then drain. Add butter, salt, or whatever you like. You can also roast or grill it, but boiling is easiest for beginners.

## **How to Open and Drain a Can Safely**

Use a handheld can opener or electric one—whatever you have. Be careful of sharp edges when removing the lid. To drain, hold the lid against the edge and pour the liquid into the sink. Or use a mesh strainer if you prefer.

And always check the can for dents or bulging—if it looks off, don't use it.



## Sauces, Spreads & Simple Add-Ons

### How to Make a Simple White Sauce (Béchamel)

This is the base for so many good things—mac and cheese, creamy casseroles, and even gravy. Don't let the fancy name fool you—it's just butter, flour, and milk.

Melt 2 tablespoons of butter in a saucepan. Whisk in 2 tablespoons of flour and let it bubble for a minute—this cooks out the flour taste. Slowly whisk in 1 cup of milk. Keep stirring until it thickens (about 5 minutes). Add salt and pepper to taste.

That's it. Now you've got a creamy base you can build on—add cheese, herbs, or use it as is.

### How to Make a Roux (Butter + Flour Base)

A roux is the same start as a white sauce, but it's used for gravies and thick soups too. Melt equal parts butter and flour—usually 2 tablespoons each—and whisk over medium heat until smooth.

- For white sauces: cook just a minute or two.
- For brown gravies: cook longer, until it darkens in color and smells nutty.

Once your roux is ready, you can slowly whisk in milk or broth depending on what you're making. Just keep stirring and it'll thicken beautifully.

### How to Melt Cheese for Nachos or Sandwiches

Low and slow is the key. Don't just throw shredded cheese into a hot pan—it'll clump and separate.

For nachos: melt a small amount of cheese with a splash of milk in the microwave or a saucepan. Stir until smooth. Add a pinch of garlic powder or chopped jalapeños if you like a kick.

For grilled cheese or sandwiches: use sliced cheese and cook on low heat with a lid to help it melt evenly.

## How to Make a Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich

This might seem too simple to explain—but sometimes, the basics are where people need to start.

Use soft bread. Spread peanut butter on one slice and jelly on the other. Press together. If your peanut butter is thick, spread gently so you don't tear the bread. You can toast it if you want, or leave it soft.

There's no wrong way—just your way.

## How to Make Gravy from Drippings or a Mix

**From drippings:** After roasting meat, pour off the drippings into a small saucepan. Skim off most of the fat (leave about 2 tablespoons). Whisk in 2 tablespoons of flour and cook for a minute. Then whisk in 1 cup broth (or water) slowly. Stir until thick and bubbly.

**From a packet:** Follow the instructions—usually just whisk into boiling water and stir until thick. Add a splash of milk or a pinch of garlic powder to make it feel more homemade.

## How to Make Instant Potatoes or Rice Taste Better

Start with the box instructions—then tweak it. Add a pat of butter, a splash of milk, or a little sour cream to your potatoes. For instant rice, try chicken bouillon instead of plain water.

A sprinkle of dried herbs or some shredded cheese can change the whole flavor. These are pantry basics that don't have to be boring.

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## Kitchen Tools & Little Tricks

### How to Measure Ingredients Properly

It's amazing how much better a recipe turns out when you just measure the right way.

Dry ingredients (like flour or sugar) need dry measuring cups—those stackable ones. Scoop, then level off with the back of a butter knife. For liquids, use a clear measuring cup with a spout. Set it on the counter and look at it at eye level to get the right line.

And always use dry spoons for spices and baking powder—don't dip a wet spoon in or it'll clump.

### How to Keep a Cutting Board from Slipping

This one's simple, but it'll make chopping so much safer. Wet a paper towel or thin dishcloth and lay it under the board. That little bit of grip keeps it steady and makes you feel more in control.

### How to Use a Can Opener (Manual or Electric)

You'd be surprised how many people feel unsure about this. With a manual one, clamp it onto the edge of the can and turn the handle to cut around. For electric, place the can under the blade and press—easy once you've done it once or twice.

Be careful lifting the lid—it's sharp. And always wipe the top of a can before opening. Dust gathers up there on store shelves.

### How to Use Kitchen Shears

Kitchen scissors are one of those tools that quietly become your best friend. Use them for cutting bacon, pizza, herbs, trimming meat, even opening food packages. Keep them sharp and clean, and only use them for food—not paper or plastic.

### How to Chop an Onion (Without Crying Too Much)

Here's a trick from real life: **store your onions in the refrigerator.** Cold onions release fewer of those eye-burning gases. When you're ready to chop, cut off both ends, peel the outer skin, and slice it in half

lengthwise. Lay the flat side down and make vertical slices, then horizontal ones.

It doesn't need to be perfect—just aim for even sizes. And if you tear up a little, no shame in that. I still do too.

## **How to Peel and Mince Garlic**

Place a clove under the flat side of a knife and give it a firm press—it pops the skin right off. To mince, just run your knife through it over and over until it's tiny bits. If garlic smell lingers on your hands, rub them on a stainless steel spoon under cold water. It really helps.

## **How to Grease a Pan**

Butter, oil, or spray—they all work. For baking, I like to butter the pan and then dust it with a little flour, especially for cakes or muffins. For cooking, just a thin coat of oil in the skillet is all you need to keep food from sticking.

## **How to Know If Your Pan Is Hot Enough**

You can sprinkle a couple drops of water in the pan—if they dance and sizzle, it's ready. Or try the butter test: if the butter foams and sizzles gently, not instantly burning, you're good to go. Don't rush—food browns better when the pan is hot enough first.

## **How to Clean as You Go**

This is something **Grandma Linda** taught me—probably when I was old enough to stir cookie dough but not old enough to clean up after myself. She always said, *“Clean as you go and the job won't feel so big at the end.”*

And she was right. While something is simmering or baking, take 30 seconds to wash a bowl or wipe the counter. It keeps the kitchen from turning into a mountain of mess—and honestly, it feels peaceful. I still think of her every time I rinse a spoon and set it in the dish rack.

---

## How to Read a Recipe and Understand Cooking Terms

Reading the recipe all the way through before you start is such a simple but helpful habit. You'll know if something needs to be prepped ahead, or if you need to let butter soften or dough rest.

Some common words:

- “Simmer” means low heat with gentle bubbles.
- “Dice” means small cubes.
- “Mince” means tiny little bits.
- “Fold” means gently combine without squashing.

And if you don't know a word? It's okay to look it up. That's how we all learned.



# Leftovers, Safety & Real-Life Food Smarts

## How to Store Leftovers Safely

First, let food cool down just a bit—don't put piping hot dishes straight into the fridge. But don't leave it sitting out for hours either. The safe zone? Within 1 to 2 hours of cooking, pack leftovers into airtight containers.

Label them if you can (even just a piece of masking tape with the date). Most leftovers are best within 3–4 days. If you know you won't eat it in that time, freeze it instead.

## How to Reheat Food Without Ruining It

Microwaves are convenient, but they can zap the life out of food if you're not careful. Here are a few tips:

- Add a splash of water to rice or pasta and cover with a damp paper towel before microwaving.
- For casseroles or meat, cover loosely with a lid or wrap to hold in moisture.
- Reheat in short bursts (30–60 seconds), stirring or flipping in between.

Toaster ovens and skilletts work great for pizza, sandwiches, or anything you want to keep crispy.

## How to Tell If Food Has Gone Bad

Use your senses.

- If it smells sour, strange, or just “off”—toss it.
- If it's slimy, sticky, or has fuzzy spots—it's time to let go.
- When in doubt? Don't risk it. I'd rather waste a little food than get sick.

Don't feel guilty—this is part of learning.

---

## **How to Make Frozen Foods Taste Better**

You don't have to eat frozen meals as-is. Add a little something to wake them up:

- Sprinkle cheese on frozen lasagna.
- Stir in some fresh herbs or lemon juice to frozen veggies.
- Add hot sauce, extra garlic, or even leftovers to boxed meals to give them a personal touch.

Even frozen pizza tastes better with extra toppings and a few minutes under the broiler.

## **How to Avoid Wasting Groceries**

Make a habit of checking your fridge every couple days. Move the older items to the front. Chop up soft veggies for soup. Throw overripe fruit into smoothies or muffins.

You don't have to be perfect—just thoughtful. Using what you have feels good, and it saves money too.

## **How to Clean Out the Fridge Without Feeling Overwhelmed**

You don't have to do it all at once. Just start small: one shelf or drawer at a time. Keep a garbage bag nearby and be honest—if it's been in there too long, it's okay to toss it.

Wipe the space with warm soapy water and dry it out before putting things back. Do a little each week and it'll never feel like a big chore.

## **How to Label and Freeze Smart**

Sharpies and masking tape are your best friends. Label containers with what it is and the date. Freeze things flat in zip-top bags when possible—it saves space and thaws faster.

A freezer full of mystery items isn't helpful. A few seconds labeling now saves a lot of head scratching later.

# Bonus Basics You Didn't Know You Needed

## How to Soften Butter Quickly (Without Melting It)

Need soft butter for toast or baking but forgot to set it out? Try this:

- **Cut it into small cubes**—smaller pieces soften faster.
- **Use a warm glass:** microwave a glass for 30 seconds, then place it upside down over the butter on a plate. It softens gently without melting.
- **Grate it with a cheese grater** if you're baking—sounds weird, but it works!

## How to Toast Bread or a Bagel Without a Toaster

No toaster? No problem. You've got a skillet or oven, right?

- **Skillet method:** Melt a little butter in a pan. Toast your bread or bagel cut-side down until golden. Flip if needed.
- **Oven method:** Broil for a minute or two, but keep an eye on it—it goes from golden to burnt fast!

It actually tastes better than a toaster, if you ask me.

## How to Make Canned Food Taste Homemade

Start by draining the liquid—it's often where the metallic or "off" taste hides. Then:

- Heat with butter or olive oil
- Add simple seasonings: garlic powder, salt, pepper, or a little sugar (especially with canned corn or tomatoes)
- Brighten things with lemon juice or vinegar if it needs a little life

Even a can of soup can be transformed with some shredded cheese, herbs, or leftover meat stirred in.

---

## **How to Peel a Boiled Egg Without Frustration**

Older eggs peel easier than fresh ones. If you struggle, here's a trick:

After boiling and cooling, gently crack the egg all over and roll it between your hands. Then peel under running water—the shell should slide off in big pieces.

## **How to Tell If Oil Is Hot Enough for Cooking**

Drop in a small piece of bread or a bit of whatever you're cooking—if it sizzles right away, it's ready. If it just sits there soaking up oil, wait a little longer.

And never walk away when oil is heating. Once it's hot, it goes fast.

## **How to Rescue a Dish That's Too Salty**

We've all over-salted something. Don't panic. Try one of these:

- Add a splash of milk or cream (for sauces/soups)
- Stir in cooked rice or pasta to absorb some of the salt
- Add a squeeze of lemon or a spoon of sugar to balance it out

Sometimes a spoonful of plain yogurt helps too.

## **How to Keep Your Fridge from Smelling**

Place an open box of baking soda in the back of your fridge. It absorbs odors and keeps things fresh.

Also, check for mystery leftovers once a week and give your shelves a wipe now and then. Little things go a long way.

## How to Know What You Can Freeze

Here's a good rule:

- **Yes:** cooked meats, soups, stews, shredded cheese, bread, raw cookie dough
- **Maybe:** milk and sour cream (can separate), cooked pasta (better in sauce)
- **No:** lettuce, cucumbers, or mayo-based salads—those don't bounce back well

If you're unsure, freeze one small portion as a test. That's how I figured out what worked in *my* kitchen.

## How to Make Meals Feel Special (Even When They're Simple)

It's not about the recipe—it's about the moment. Light a candle. Put dinner on a real plate. Play music while you cook. Sit down together, even if it's just two of you.

Food doesn't have to be fancy to be meaningful. A grilled cheese and soup night, when served with love, sticks in your memory longer than a gourmet meal.

---

## What to Do With Leftover Mashed Potatoes

1. **Potato Cakes** – Mix with shredded cheese and an egg, shape into patties, and pan-fry until golden.
2. **Shepherd's Pie** – Spread mashed potatoes over cooked ground beef and veggies. Bake until golden and bubbly.
3. **Mashed Potato Waffles** – Scoop into a greased waffle iron and cook until crisp on the outside.
4. **Potato Soup Thickener** – Stir mashed potatoes into broth-based soups to make them creamy and filling.
5. **Potato Bread or Rolls** – Add mashed potatoes into your bread dough for soft, moist rolls.
6. **Cheesy Mashed Potato Bake** – Layer mashed potatoes in a baking dish with cheese and breadcrumbs on top. Bake until hot and crispy.
7. **Potato & Egg Scramble** – Heat a bit of mashed potatoes in a skillet and scramble in a couple of eggs.
8. **Pierogi Filling** – Use seasoned mashed potatoes with cheese inside homemade (or store-bought) dough.
9. **Tater Tots (Shortcut Version)** – Mix mashed potatoes with shredded cheese, shape into little bites, and bake or air fry.
10. **Mashed Potato Pancakes** – A thinner version of potato cakes—great for breakfast with sour cream.
11. **Mashed Potato Bowls** – Build a “bowl meal” with mashed potatoes, leftover meat, cheese, corn, and gravy on top.
12. **Loaded Potato Muffins** – Spoon into muffin tins, top with cheese, bacon bits, and bake for a grab-and-go snack.
13. **Mini Mashed Potato Casseroles** – Scoop into ramekins with chopped ham and cheddar. Bake until golden.
14. **Potato Gratin Hack** – Spread mashed potatoes in a dish, top with sliced cooked potatoes, cheese, and bake.
15. **Savory Potato Puffs** – Mix with egg, cheese, herbs, and bake in mini muffin tins until fluffy and golden.

## What to Do With Leftover Chicken

1. **BBQ Chicken Sandwiches** – Shred and mix with BBQ sauce. Pile onto buns with pickles or coleslaw.
  2. **Creamy Chicken Pasta** – Toss into hot pasta with cream cheese, garlic, and frozen peas.
  3. **Chicken Fried Rice** – Chop and stir-fry with rice, scrambled egg, soy sauce, and veggies.
  4. **Chicken Quesadillas** – Layer with cheese in a tortilla and grill until crisp and melty.
  5. **Buffalo Chicken Wraps** – Toss with buffalo sauce and wrap in a tortilla with ranch and lettuce.
  6. **Chicken & Rice Casserole** – Stir into cooked rice, cream of mushroom soup, and top with cheese.
  7. **Chicken Tacos** – Shred and reheat with taco seasoning. Serve in tortillas with toppings.
  8. **White Chicken Chili** – Add to a pot with white beans, broth, green chiles, and cumin.
  9. **Chicken Caesar Salad** – Chop and toss into a salad with romaine, croutons, and Caesar dressing.
  10. **Baked Chicken Nachos** – Layer over tortilla chips with cheese, beans, and bake.
  11. **Chicken Pot Pie** – Mix with frozen veggies and cream of chicken soup. Bake under pie crust or biscuits.
  12. **Chicken Soup or Ramen** – Stir into broth with noodles, spinach, and garlic for a cozy soup.
  13. **BBQ Chicken Pizza** – Spread BBQ sauce on flatbread or crust, top with chicken, onion, and cheese.
  14. **Chicken Stuffed Peppers** – Mix with cooked rice and salsa, fill into halved bell peppers, and bake.
  15. **Chicken Pasta Salad** – Dice and stir into cold pasta with dressing, cherry tomatoes, and cheese cubes.
-

## What to Do With Leftover Rice

1. **Fried Rice** – Classic! Sauté rice with a scrambled egg, veggies, and soy sauce. Add leftover meat if you have it.
2. **Rice & Bean Burritos** – Wrap rice with canned beans, cheese, and salsa in a tortilla for a quick lunch.
3. **Breakfast Rice Bowl** – Heat with milk, cinnamon, and a drizzle of maple syrup—like cozy rice pudding.
4. **Chicken & Rice Soup** – Stir rice into broth with leftover chicken and veggies for an easy homemade soup.
5. **Stuffed Peppers** – Mix with ground meat, sauce, and seasonings. Fill bell peppers and bake.
6. **Rice Frittata** – Add cooked rice to beaten eggs and cheese, then bake or cook in a skillet until set.
7. **Cheesy Rice Bake** – Stir rice with cheese, milk, and cooked broccoli or spinach. Bake until hot and bubbly.
8. **Veggie Stir Fry Bowl** – Heat rice with leftover stir-fried veggies or roasted vegetables and sesame oil.
9. **Taco Rice Skillet** – Mix with leftover taco meat, beans, corn, and salsa for a one-pan dinner.
10. **Cabbage Roll Skillet** – Stir into cooked ground beef, cabbage, tomato sauce, and garlic for an easy deconstructed cabbage roll.
11. **Crispy Rice Cakes** – Mix with an egg, shape into patties, and pan-fry for a crispy side dish.
12. **Rice Salad** – Toss with chopped veggies, vinaigrette, and feta or cheddar. Serve cold or room temp.
13. **Rice-Stuffed Zucchini or Tomatoes** – Hollow out veggies and fill with seasoned rice, then bake.
14. **Rice Omelet** – Add cold rice into an omelet with soy sauce or cheese—it sounds odd, but it's delicious.
15. **Homemade Sushi Bowls** – Top rice with shredded carrots, cucumber, avocado, and a drizzle of soy sauce or spicy mayo.

## What to Do With Leftover Pasta

1. **Baked Pasta Casserole** – Mix with a little extra sauce and shredded cheese. Bake until bubbly and golden.
  2. **Pasta Frittata** – Toss cold pasta with eggs and cheese. Pour into a skillet and cook like a crustless quiche.
  3. **Cold Pasta Salad** – Toss with Italian dressing, chopped veggies, and cubes of cheese or ham.
  4. **Pasta Soup** – Stir into chicken or vegetable broth with frozen veggies for a quick noodle soup.
  5. **Spaghetti Muffins** – Press sauced spaghetti into muffin tins, sprinkle with cheese, and bake until firm.
  6. **Mac & Cheese Bites** – Scoop into mini muffin tins, top with cheese and breadcrumbs, and bake.
  7. **Stovetop Alfredo Bake** – Warm with a splash of milk and shredded cheese for creamy comfort food.
  8. **Pasta-Stuffed Peppers** – Fill bell peppers with leftover pasta and top with cheese.
  9. **Garlic Butter Pasta Skillet** – Sauté cold pasta with garlic, butter, and Parmesan for a quick side.
  10. **Lasagna Roll-Ups** – If using flat noodles, roll with cheese and sauce and bake in a dish.
  11. **Taco Pasta Bake** – Mix plain pasta with leftover taco meat and salsa, top with cheese, and bake.
  12. **Spaghetti Grilled Cheese** – Sandwich leftover spaghetti and cheese between two slices of bread and grill.
  13. **Pasta Stir Fry** – Toss pasta in a hot skillet with oil, veggies, and soy sauce—like lo mein.
  14. **Pasta Pizza Bake** – Press into a baking dish like a crust, top with sauce, cheese, and toppings.
  15. **Eggplant or Zucchini Pasta Boats** – Hollow out veggies, fill with pasta, and roast until tender.
-

## What to Do With Leftover Taco Meat

1. **Taco Salad** – Layer taco meat on chopped lettuce with cheese, beans, salsa, and crushed chips.
2. **Nachos** – Spread over tortilla chips, sprinkle with cheese, and bake until melty. Add sour cream and salsa.
3. **Taco Quesadillas** – Press into tortillas with cheese and grill until golden.
4. **Stuffed Peppers** – Mix with rice and salsa, fill peppers, top with cheese, and bake.
5. **Taco Soup** – Stir into broth with canned beans, corn, tomatoes, and taco seasoning.
6. **Mexican Mac & Cheese** – Add to cooked macaroni with cheese and a spoon of salsa or green chiles.
7. **Breakfast Tacos** – Heat taco meat with scrambled eggs, cheese, and wrap in a tortilla.
8. **Taco Stuffed Potatoes** – Spoon over baked potatoes and top with cheese and sour cream.
9. **Taco Pizza** – Spread over pizza dough with salsa as the sauce, cheese, and olives. Bake and top with lettuce.
10. **Walking Tacos** – Pour into a bag of crushed chips, add cheese, lettuce, and sour cream.
11. **Taco Crescent Rolls** – Roll into crescent dough with cheese and bake.
12. **Mini Taco Cups** – Press small tortillas into muffin tins, fill with taco meat, cheese, and bake.
13. **Taco Grilled Cheese** – Sandwich taco meat and cheese in bread and grill.
14. **Loaded Tater Tots** – Bake tater tots, top with taco meat, cheese, sour cream, and green onions.
15. **Enchiladas** – Roll taco meat into tortillas, cover with enchilada sauce and cheese, and bake.

## What to Do With Leftover Baked Potatoes

1. Slice and pan-fry in butter for crispy breakfast potatoes
2. Chop and mix into a cheesy potato soup
3. Hollow out and make stuffed potato skins with cheese and bacon
4. Cube and roast with onions and peppers for a quick hash
5. Slice thin and layer in a skillet with cream and cheese for a mini gratin
6. Make twice-baked potatoes—mash the insides, mix with goodies, and refill
7. Dice and mix into a cold potato salad with mustard or mayo
8. Add to a breakfast burrito with scrambled eggs and sausage
9. Shred for quick hash browns or fritters
10. Dice and toss into a pot of vegetable soup for added heartiness
11. Use in a casserole with sour cream, shredded cheese, and green onions
12. Layer with chili and cheese for an easy baked potato bowl
13. Toss with olive oil and ranch seasoning and roast until crispy
14. Add to a quiche or frittata for a loaded breakfast bake
15. Scoop out, mash, and use in potato pancakes or croquettes

## What to Do With Leftover Hard-Boiled Eggs

1. Chop for classic egg salad sandwiches
  2. Slice onto avocado toast for a protein boost
  3. Make deviled eggs with mayo, mustard, and paprika
  4. Grate into a green salad for extra flavor
  5. Add to a Cobb or chef salad
  6. Slice and layer into sandwiches or wraps
  7. Mash with avocado and lemon for a healthy spread
  8. Dice and stir into potato or pasta salad
  9. Add to ramen or noodle bowls
  10. Slice onto cold rice bowls with soy sauce and veggies
  11. Mix into a breakfast hash with potatoes and sausage
  12. Chop and fold into tuna salad for richness
  13. Top with everything bagel seasoning and eat as-is
  14. Grate into a buttery biscuit sandwich with cheese
  15. Slice into a grilled cheese for an egg melt
-

## **What to Do With Leftover Cooked Bacon or Sausage**

1. Add to scrambled eggs or omelets
2. Toss into mac and cheese
3. Mix into pancake or waffle batter
4. Stir into grits or breakfast bowls
5. Add to baked beans for extra flavor
6. Crumble over salads as a salty topping
7. Stir into potato soup or chowders
8. Mix into savory muffins or cornbread
9. Add to quesadillas or grilled cheese
10. Toss into pasta with a cream or tomato sauce
11. Sprinkle over pizza before baking
12. Add to deviled eggs or egg salad
13. Fold into biscuit or crescent roll pinwheels
14. Stir into rice or risotto for a smoky touch
15. Use in wraps or sandwiches with lettuce and cheese

## **What to Do With Leftover Bread or Rolls**

1. Cube and bake into homemade croutons
2. Tear into chunks for stuffing or dressing
3. Make French toast or overnight bake
4. Toast and top with garlic butter for quick garlic bread
5. Cube and bake into a bread pudding
6. Blend into homemade breadcrumbs
7. Make mini paninis or grilled sandwiches
8. Spread with peanut butter and slice for snacks
9. Tear into soup like Italian ribollita
10. Use in meatloaf or meatball mix
11. Make cheesy toast for tomato soup
12. Turn into open-faced melts with leftovers on top
13. Toast with cinnamon sugar for a quick sweet bite
14. Cut in half and make personal pizzas
15. Use rolls to make sliders or mini sandwiches

## **What to Do With Leftover Roast or Ground Beef**

1. Add to spaghetti or baked ziti
2. Stir into scrambled eggs for a breakfast bowl
3. Make stuffed peppers or zucchini boats
4. Layer in quesadillas or burritos
5. Add to soups like minestrone or beef barley
6. Make a shepherd's pie with mashed potatoes
7. Mix into fried rice or rice bowls
8. Use for sloppy joes or BBQ sandwiches
9. Make mini pot pies with veggies and gravy
10. Fill crescent rolls or biscuit dough for beef pockets
11. Add to nachos or taco salad
12. Make homemade pizza with beef topping
13. Stir into mac and cheese for a protein boost
14. Use for Philly cheesesteak-style sandwiches
15. Fold into enchiladas or taquitos

## **What to Do With Leftover Beans**

1. Make burritos or quesadillas
  2. Add to soups or stews
  3. Toss into taco salad
  4. Blend into hummus-style dip
  5. Mash for bean dip with chips
  6. Add to chili or sloppy joe mix
  7. Use in veggie burgers or patties
  8. Mix into pasta or grain bowls
  9. Bake into enchiladas or casseroles
  10. Add to eggs for breakfast burritos
  11. Use in a wrap with cheese and greens
  12. Stir into rice for a quick meal
  13. Spoon onto toast with salsa
  14. Add to nachos or layered dip
  15. Puree with garlic and lemon for a warm dip
-

## **What to Do With Leftover Cooked Vegetables**

1. Add to soups or broths
2. Mix into scrambled eggs or omelets
3. Stir into pasta or mac and cheese
4. Add to quesadillas or wraps
5. Use in stir-fry or fried rice
6. Make veggie sandwiches or melts
7. Puree into a creamy soup
8. Toss into a breakfast hash
9. Add to savory muffins or breads
10. Blend into tomato sauce
11. Layer into lasagna or baked pasta
12. Stir into couscous or quinoa bowls
13. Use in enchiladas or burritos
14. Add to pizza with cheese
15. Mix into a frittata or mini quiche

## **What to Do With Leftover Cheese Ends or Shreds**

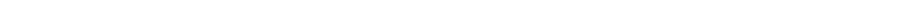
1. Toss into scrambled eggs or omelets
2. Stir into rice or pasta
3. Melt into quesadillas or grilled cheese
4. Sprinkle on top of baked potatoes
5. Add to casseroles or baked dishes
6. Use in a cheese sauce for veggies
7. Stir into mac and cheese
8. Top nachos or taco salad
9. Melt over burgers or sandwiches
10. Add to pizza or flatbread
11. Mix into biscuit or cornbread batter
12. Sprinkle into soup before serving
13. Stir into risotto or polenta
14. Add to frittatas or egg muffins
15. Make a mini cheese plate with crackers and fruit

## **A Note to Close This Chapter...**

As you begin cooking your way through these pages, I hope you feel a sense of comfort, confidence, and connection. Whether you're learning to cook for yourself, feeding a friend, or just trying to make something good without a big fuss, this little book is here to help. It's not about perfection—it's about heart. Every recipe comes from our family table to yours, filled with real food, simple steps, and love in every bite.

From one home to another—happy cooking, and may your kitchen always feel like home.

With love,  
*Amy*



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