

The Simplified Cookbook

delicious meals with effortless prep

EMILY LEY



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798



The Simplified Cookbook

© 2025 Emily Ley

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Photography by Kris D'Amico, Whitney Hawkins, and Carly Tanner.

Thomas Nelson titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Any internet addresses, phone numbers, or company or product information printed in this book are offered as a resource and are not intended in any way to be or to imply an endorsement by Thomas Nelson, nor does Thomas Nelson vouch for the existence, content, or services of these sites, phone numbers, companies, or products beyond the life of this book.

Interior design: Laura Kashner and Emily Ghattas

ISBN 978-1-4002-3122-5 (HC)
ISBN 978-1-4002-3136-2 (eBook)

Printed in Malaysia

25 26 27 28 29 COS 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2



To my younger (much taller) brother, Brett. I don't know why you got all the chef genes from Mom and Dad (lucky), but I sure do admire the way you love and feed your family with your entire heart. I'm so proud of you and am cheering you on always.

Written in honor of my grandmother, Frances. She loved hosting dinner parties and always set the fanciest tables—with white linen tablecloths, a full spread of silver, and beautiful porcelain china. She knew the magic of an evening was multifaceted, found not just on the plate, but also in the precise press of the tablecloth, in the twinkle of lights dimmed just so, and in the feelings of warmth and welcome in the air. Her love for hospitality lives on in us.





Contents

<i>A Note from Emily</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Assumptions</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Stamps of Approval</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Kitchen Notes</i>	<i>1</i>

SECTION ONE: BREAKFAST

<i>Breakfast Recipes</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Breakfast Assembly Meals</i>	<i>58</i>

SECTION TWO: LUNCH

<i>Lunch Recipes</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Lunch Assembly Meals</i>	<i>94</i>

SECTION THREE: DINNER

<i>Dinner Recipes</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Dinner Assembly Meals</i>	<i>156</i>

SECTION FOUR: DESSERT

<i>Dessert Recipes</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>Dessert Assembly Meals</i>	<i>200</i>

SECTION FIVE: FANCY

<i>Recipes</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>Cooking Temps</i>	<i>217</i>
<i>Substitutions</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>221</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>224</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>227</i>





A Note from Emily

They say authors write the books they need to read. And if that isn't true with this cookbook, I don't know what is. My name is Emily. I'm an entrepreneur, an author, a wife, and a mom to three school-age kids (Brady and twins Tyler and Caroline). Our lives are, to say the least, full and busy.

By trade, I'm an expert at organizing and simplifying the complicated parts of life—I created the best-selling Simplified Planner® and accompanying line of organizational tools in 2008. But one part of our family life has always been more challenging than all the rest: meals.

You see, my family wants to eat three times a day. Three! And sometimes more. As someone who doesn't necessarily enjoy making a giant mess in the kitchen or following complicated recipes most of my family won't eat anyway, cooking and meal planning are the parts of mom life I enjoy the least. This was hard and complicated when my kids were small and home all the time. But it is exponentially harder now that they are involved in sports and other activities outside of school.

I'm here to tell you there is hope. Whether you are a young adult trying to figure out what to feed yourself or you're a mom of children going in twelve different directions all day, this book is for you.

This frustration all changed for me a few years ago when I decided to stop reinventing the wheel every day. Instead of trying new recipes on busy weeknights or planning for multistep, million-ingredient meals on busy evenings—or wondering at three o'clock on a hectic Tuesday afternoon what I was going to make for dinner—I made a list of my go-to meals and decided to stick to them. These meals are the ones that just work. They're satisfying, stupid easy to make, and family approved.

Side note: "stupid easy" is my most favorite term of endearment when it comes to recipes. Stupid easy is better than regular easy. It means you have to use very little brainpower to successfully get your family from point A (hungry) to point B (fed).

What follows in this book is a very pretty presentation of my family's go-tos. I've gathered these over forty-two years of life, including fourteen years of motherhood, from friends, family, and happy accidents in the kitchen. I can't begin to tell you how excited I am that this book has come to fruition. When the idea of a cookbook was presented to me, I looked around the room and said, "Wait, me? Walk me through this. I don't love cooking. I love feeding my family and I love our time together around the table, but sautéing and chopping and mincing . . . nope."

At that moment, this concept clicked for me. Many, many of us feel this way. We love our people, and we love good food. But still. Our lives are so very full, and if cooking isn't your interest or talent, it can be quite overwhelming.

The Simplified Cookbook is your easy guide to feeding yourself and your family three times a day. I've taken extra care to make sure most of these recipes need fewer than six ingredients and take less than fifteen minutes to prep. They can be tweaked to fit your tastes and some dietary needs, but the basic recipes are easy and delicious as they are. I can't wait to hear how this helps you simplify your time in the kitchen and gives you the time and space to enjoy meals around the table with your people.

xo,
Emily



ell

Assumptions

This book assumes a few simple things.

You have simple ingredients. In each ingredient list, I've left off items like water, salt, pepper, and cooking spray because you have those in your kitchen and can add them to a recipe fairly easily.

You can add salt and pepper to taste. I've also left off the ingredients salt and pepper when the recipe calls for "salt and pepper to taste." This means add however much you'd like. When in doubt, start with 1/4 teaspoon and taste. You can always add more later.

You can sub ingredients in and out as you see fit. Feel free to swap in and out types of vegetables, cheese, and meats throughout this cookbook. I used to get really hung up on the idea that recipes must be cooked in precise and exact ways. It's not really as complicated as that. If you'd like to use cheddar cheese instead of mozzarella, give it a try! In the grand scheme of things, it truly doesn't matter. (This is one of the biggest lessons I have learned as I've gotten more comfortable in the kitchen.)

You can adjust to your own individual dietary needs. I've omitted labels like dairy-free and gluten-free from these recipes under the assumption that *you* are best equipped to make educated, informed decisions about what is best to feed those with specific dietary requirements or preferences.

Our prep times might be different. I've taken care to make these relatively quick and easy, and have listed approximate prep times for each recipe. However, these times may vary depending on what kitchen gadgets you use, which items you purchase premade or pre-chopped, how many children might be hanging off you while you're working in the kitchen, and innumerable other factors.

You are the chef and can get fancy when you want to. I've given you the quickest way possible to get from point A (hungry) to point B (fed). In some recipes, I've also given you ways to "make it fancy" and trust that you'll follow where your heart leads!

Sometimes you prefer the simplest way forward. For instance, in our Sheet Pan Pancakes recipe, I've recommended pancake mix instead of "from scratch" pancake ingredients. There will always be times when the long way around is the way to go, but for the sake of simplicity, we've taken an easy-breezy approach here.



ell

Stamps of Approval

Sometimes you're in a big hurry and you just need your best friend to flip open this book, point at a page, and say, "This one." Because they know exactly what you're dealing with and what you need in that moment. The Stamps of Approval in this book are basically my version of that. As you flip through the book and see these stamps throughout, just pretend like I'm flipping to each of those pages and saying, "This one. Trust me." Below are brief descriptions of each kind of stamp.

These Stamps of Approval are not exhaustive. They do not identify every single freezer friendly meal or each and every favorite (we'd have stamps on every page if that was the case). Instead, I've used these stamps to call out the game changers and the crowd favorites. You'll also find a few personal notes from me written alongside a couple recipes as well.



Picky Eater Approved: These recipes are tried-and-true winners with the picky eaters in my house (the little ones and the big ones). Though not all picky eaters are created equal, I can pretty much guarantee these will pass any "just try a little bite" test.



Great for Leftovers: Cook once, eat twice? Don't mind if I do! These recipes make great leftovers exactly as they are or reheated and doctored up a little.



Emily's Pick: While I love every single recipe in this book and will cling to this hardback as a beloved resource for the rest of my days, I do have a few favorites. I'll point those out and tell you to just trust me. Make these recipes first.



Easy to Make Ahead: When life gets wild, we have to plan ahead. If you have some time on a weekend and you'd like to get a head start on meals for the week, give these recipes a try.



Freezer Friendly: In the same spirit of working in advance, make a few versions of these recipes, and pop them in the freezer for a day when you need something easy.





Kitchen Notes

ell

<i>Make-Ahead Lunch Box Meals</i>	3
<i>Feeding Picky Eaters</i>	4
<i>Encouragement for the Kid-Ubering Mom</i>	6
<i>For the Woman Trying to Eat Healthy-ish</i>	8
<i>Help for Morning Chaos</i>	11
<i>Assembly Meals—Your New Best Friend</i>	12
<i>So You Want to Love Cooking, but You Just Don't</i>	14
<i>Freezer Meals for Big Life Events</i>	16
<i>Why Dinnertime Matters</i>	19
<i>Perfectionism Has No Place in Your Kitchen</i>	20
<i>Rely on a Perpetual Grocery List</i>	22
<i>What Doesn't Really Matter in the Kitchen</i>	25
<i>Gadgets, Gizmos, and Little Luxuries</i>	26
<i>Nourishing Your Body</i>	29
<i>Additional Tips</i>	30



ell

Make-Ahead Lunch Box Meals

Like many moms, I begin each school year Pinterest-inspired—ready to craft adorable, precious, whimsical bento boxes for my children’s lunches the night before school starts. Inevitably, by the third day of school, I’m tossing bags of Cheez-Its to each kid to help round out whatever they’ve packed last minute. The good news is, for those of us who have “pack lunches” on our to-do lists, there is a simplified approach that will not only make your kid smile but will also give you back some of your time.

Here are a few lunch box tips to keep in your back pocket.

Consider carving out a spot in your freezer for pre-prepared lunch box mains. All the ideas below freeze well. These aren’t revolutionary. But sometimes we just need our memory jogged a little to remember all the great options out there.

- Ham (or turkey)-and-cheese sandwiches
- PB&J sandwiches
- Smoothies
- Muffins
- Quesadillas
- Wraps
- Tuna sandwiches
- Bagels and cream cheese
- Pimento cheese sandwiches

When making sandwiches to freeze, place any condiments between the meat and cheese (these act as a barrier to keep the condiment from making the bread mushy).

Each item will stay fresh for about one to two months in your freezer!*

Simply transfer your item from the freezer to the lunch box the morning of. It should be thawed perfectly in time for lunch.

At a certain point, children will be able to help pack their own lunch boxes. Consider this a win! Mine know to pack four items in their lunch: a main item (like a sandwich or wrap), something salty, something sweet, and something fresh. Little ones helping to pack their own lunches is game changing.

* According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/How-long-does-lunch-meat-stay-fresh>.

ell

Feeding Picky Eaters

I made it my mission to raise kids who are adventurous eaters. I introduced new foods as early as my pediatrician approved, shared bites of my own meals at restaurants or at home, and made sure we regularly tried foods with different textures, unique flavors, and interesting backstories. Thanks to genetics, sheer luck, and my special focus on this point, my kids will eat just about anything. Caroline will not eat watermelon (a fact we all still cannot get over), and Tyler doesn't like cold tomatoes. Otherwise, my only picky eater is . . . my husband, Bryan.

So, like many of you, I am cooking for a picky eater. Bryan is a meat-and-potatoes guy. He won't eat many vegetables (unless they're part of a traditional Caesar salad), most seafood, or any white condiments. (How one can live without ranch dressing is beyond me, but here we are. We love him anyway.)

For a few years, I tried cooking dinners that made everyone happy. I quickly learned this was nearly impossible in a family of five—someone was inevitably unhappy, and I was frustrated. Instead, I now subscribe to the 3/4 rule. My goal is to make a meal that accomplishes at least three of the four goals below.

1. Few ingredients
2. Easy to make and clean up
3. Generally wholesome and healthy-ish (to me, that means it includes some form of healthy fat, fiber, and protein)
4. Something most everyone at the table will eat (or at least try)

If you aren't constantly preparing foods your people have strange feelings about, you will emerge from dinnertime victorious. For example, Bryan will not eat broccoli. Not even if you paid him. My kids and I, however, love it. They love it roasted, covered in cheese, or raw. It's in our rotation, and if a meal includes broccoli, Bryan eats a little more of the other things, which leaves more broccoli for the kids and me. In general, I've learned that going with the flow and allowing people's tastes to be what they are is just as important as continuing to introduce new foods. In my experience, no one ever decided they liked a mushroom after you made them eat it.

Regarding this challenge, I say . . .

Pick your battles. ♥



ell

Encouragement for the Kid-Ubering Mom

Plenty of friends set my expectations for the toddler years. There'd be unending diapers, and safety contraptions to install, and jelly on nearly every surface at all times. But no one warned me about the "in-between years." These are the years in between toddlerhood and high school—when your kids can't drive themselves yet, but also don't need you to fasten their seat belts. They are more independent, but not quite teenagers. And they're involved in literally everything because these are the years when we try *it all* to see what we like most. These are the chaotic, busy, amazing years full of what I call "Kid Ubering."

It is exactly what it sounds like. You are the Uber driver. They are the passengers. Their schedules dictate where you will drive, and you hope you will receive a five-star rating at the end of the day. You are driving All. The. Time. You are driving so much that you start to move into your car. In some bag or box system, you have snacks (because everyone is always hungry). You have socks (because someone will inevitably forget them for soccer). You have pencils (so the kids who aren't dressing in the backseat for practice can do their homework). You have wet wipes (because the aforementioned jelly situation really never ends).

Some days, you are on top of the world and feel very proud of your preparedness and forward thinking. Other days, you are stopping at CVS for overpriced trail mix and extra hair ties for ballet. Kid Ubering is not easy. Being prepared in the car (with all the necessary, just-in-case supplies) is helpful, but being prepared in the kitchen (when everyone comes pouring in the front door post-practice, sweaty and starving) is genius. Here are a few rules for being a five-star Kid Uber driver.

Meal prepping is your friend. If you're going to be cooking at home on a night like this, employ your slow cooker or Instant Pot (no, it won't explode—it's a fantastic tool for busy people).

If it's financially feasible, make your busiest night every week your take-out night. Schedule delivery of something wonderful to arrive a few minutes after you know you'll be home. Dinner: done.

Instead of stressing about what to make on activity-heavy nights, slap a tradition on it and use easy recipes that you know are winners: Pizza Fridays (order it or throw it in the oven), Grilled Cheese Night (add a thin layer of mayonnaise to the outside of the bread; trust me on this one), Pasta Night (boil some pasta, top it with whatever jarred sauce you have on hand), or Leftovers Night (especially good if the meal was a hit the first time).

Speaking of leftovers, take advantage of them. Do your kids love a particular dish? Double the recipe so you have leftovers waiting to be heated up later in the week. Add a bagged salad or some steamed veggies, and this easily can satisfy hungry kiddos and lighten your burden for the evening.

In our house, I do most of the after-school Kid Ubering, so my husband makes it home before me. Sometimes we use this opportunity to order Five Guys (bunless burgers are my jam), or my husband makes his specialty: spaghetti noodles with Rao's Homemade spaghetti sauce. Voilà.



ell

For the Woman Trying to Eat Healthy-ish

Before we dive into this topic, let me say—I have *feelings* about diet culture. Having grown up in the nineties, when every diet fad imaginable was popular, I've had a complex relationship with food. In our family, we believe all foods are good (yes, even all those sugar-coated cereals—because they're delicious). We try to eat balanced meals (with healthy fats, fibers, and protein) while enjoying more of some foods and less of others. Essentially, we don't have hard-and-fast rules on foods because my brain struggles with that. If you tell me something is totally off-limits, I immediately want it. So instead of “healthy,” I like to say “healthy-ish.” It just lightens the mood a little.

Personally, I feel my very best when I'm eating lots of lean proteins, plenty of veggies, and a variety of fruit. My body loves whole-food nutrition and limited processed foods. But some days, the easiest thing to get on the table is tacos. Or hamburgers. Or baked spaghetti.

This used to trip me up a lot. These days, I make sure every meal has a good veggie option and plenty of protein. The rest of the meal is fine—even if it's taco shells or pasta or a loaf of French bread. Sometimes I want to enjoy these things. Other times I'll reach for extra veggies and less of the more carb-heavy or processed foods. The best way to cater to any particular preferences, in my opinion, is to have options.

This is how we get around our resident picky eater (love you, Bryan) and how we satisfy the unique palates of three rapidly growing preteen children. There are many ways the recipes in this book can be adapted to be healthier.

Add a salad. Keep a little bit (not too much) of lettuce on hand. My favorites are baby butter lettuce and romaine. You can buy these and chop, rinse, and dry them yourself, or you can buy them pre-chopped in a bag.

Make a veggie swap. On Sundays, my husband likes to grill steaks. I usually handle the sides, which are typically a Caesar salad and baked potatoes. When I discovered a great deal on frozen steam-in-bags of broccoli at Aldi once, I stocked up. Now, while making baked potatoes for the rest of the family, I steam a bag of broccoli for myself, and for just about a dollar, I can make my very own side of loaded broccoli—broccoli topped with all the delicious things you'd normally put on a baked potato.

Substitute ingredients. If you're trying to limit carbs, consider subbing a protein pasta option. If you're watching fat levels, ground turkey can replace ground beef without most people knowing you've made the switch! Fiber-rich whole-grain bread will take a sandwich or French toast in a more health-conscious direction.

Enjoy your meal, then finish it off with fruits or veggies. Life is far too short to deprive yourself, never mind the damage diet culture has caused for so many people. Even if you're working to lose a few pounds or get healthier, you can still enjoy the tacos, pancakes, and hamburgers. Have a little, then finish up with extra veggies or fresh fruit. Eating something more carb-heavy alongside healthy fats, fiber, and protein will keep you on the right track.





ell

Help for Morning Chaos

We've all experienced it. We pressed snooze one too many times. The dog won't come in from his morning trip outside. And someone can't find their shoes. In less than an hour, the morning routine has gone off the rails.

But wait! This can go one of two ways: Your kids can reach into the fridge, grab a high-protein breakfast burrito, pop it in the microwave, and be fed and ready to go in less than five minutes.

Or the fridge could be bare. Everyone could come unglued. And granola bars could be inhaled on the way to school.

Nothing wrong with a granola bar for breakfast, but it's no breakfast burrito, and you can't beat starting your day with some protein.

Plan for the unexpected. Because, as my dad says, if it can happen, it will. And at the most inopportune time.

This is me telling you to stock that freezer! Future you will thank past you for having the foresight (and taking the time) to prep a few things before the inevitable morning madness unfolds.

MORNING MADNESS TIPS

- Keep grab-and-go breakfast items on hand (and within small-people reach), such as Greek yogurt, protein bars, or single-serve oatmeal cups.
- Once a month, spend an hour or so making breakfast sandwiches or burritos to keep in the freezer. When you need them, simply take them out, wrap them in paper towels, and microwave for 2 minutes (or until fully warmed).
- If you're not a big breakfast eater (on weekdays, I'm not), try adding a little protein to your morning drink. I love Premier Protein added to my coffee or a scoop of vanilla protein to a smoothie.

ell

Assembly Meals—Your New Best Friend

Some days, it's 6 p.m., I'm starving, and I just want to be able to throw a few things together to get everyone fed. Enter our superhero: assembly meals.

I know what you're thinking: *What in the world is an assembly meal?* Well, if you're like me and cooking doesn't always spark joy, I want you to know that you have options other than takeout or pizza delivery. You don't need a culinary degree or a pantry full of exotic ingredients to whip up a delicious dinner for your family. Sometimes the best meals are the ones that come together with just a few simple ingredients.

Think of assembly meals as your easiest go-tos—quick, simple, and so satisfying. These are the meals where precise measuring and extra steps go out the window, and you get your people fed by throwing together whatever ingredients you have on hand. It's all about creativity and flexibility—two words that always catch my attention.

Picture this: whatever veggies are around, a protein of your choice (hello, leftover rotisserie chicken!), some pasta, and your favorite sauce. Toss it all together in a bowl, and voilà, dinner is served. No need to stress about following a complicated recipe or spending hours making a mess in the kitchen.

In addition to these basics, I like to keep several items regularly stocked in my fridge, freezer, and pantry so I have last-minute options when I need them. These aren't our everyday meals, but they're what I reach for in a pinch. Plus, they're often a bit more affordable than fast food or takeout.

- Frozen lasagna
- Frozen chicken tenders
- Macaroni and cheese
- Frozen veggies of all sorts (steam-in-bag options are great)
- Pasta
- Spaghetti sauce

Feeding your family doesn't have to be complicated to be done well and with a lot of love. Assembly meals might be gatherings of leftovers, or they might be arrangements of charcuterie and whatever cheese and crackers you have. Essentially, assembly meals are made with the ingredients you have on hand, with the time you have, and for the people you love. Throughout each section of this cookbook, you'll find both recipes and assembly meals to choose from.

The next time you're feeling overwhelmed by the thought of cooking dinner, remember that a delicious meal can be simply assembled in no time.



ell

So You Want to Love Cooking, but You Just Don't

Let's talk about something near and dear to our hearts (and stomachs). I know cooking isn't everyone's cup of tea. In fact, some of us would rather do just about anything else than spend hours in the kitchen after a busy day tending to #alltheotherthings. But wouldn't it be nice to actually enjoy whipping up a meal for your family without feeling like you're auditioning for a cooking show? Trust me, I get it.

If you're nodding along, thinking, *Yes, Emily, that's me!* here are a few ideas that might just help you find the same measure of kitchen joy they've given me.

Focus on simple recipes. If you've picked up this cookbook, you're on the right track. Discovering a few go-to meals your family loves and you enjoy cooking is game changing. Opt for recipes with just a few ingredients and easy-to-follow instructions. Keep it straightforward to reduce stress and make cooking less of a chore.

Make a meal plan. Take a few minutes each week to plan your meals—at least your dinners. Depending on your circumstances, you might be able to count on, for example, one night out, one night of leftovers, and one on-the-go night with takeout. That leaves you with just four dinners to map out. It will take a few minutes to plan things out, but knowing what you'll be cooking ahead of time can save you from last-minute scrambling and decision fatigue.

Cook in batches. Utilize batch-cooking techniques to prepare larger quantities of food at once. This can save time throughout the week and provide ready-made meals for busy days. You can batch-cook quinoa, rice, vegetables (potatoes, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts), and protein like chicken or beef.

Get the family involved. Turn meal preparation into a family activity by assigning tasks to each family member. This is a great opportunity for teaching moments. Not only does sharing the responsibilities lighten your load, but it also fosters quality time and teaches valuable cooking skills.

Experiment with one-pot meals. Simplify your cooking process by making one-pot meals like soups, stews, or casseroles. They require less cleanup, and often you'll have leftovers for the next day.

Embrace convenience. If it fits into your budget, don't hesitate to use precut vegetables, frozen onions or minced garlic, canned beans, or rotisserie chicken to streamline cooking. These convenience foods can significantly cut down on cooking time and effort. Also, scour Amazon for finds that make cooking easier (veggie choppers forever!).

Cook what you like. Here's a game changer—cook what you actually like to eat. No more baking salmon and spinach when it doesn't even sound appetizing to you. Curate a list of go-to meals that are sure to make bellies and hearts happy.

Romanticize the process. Enjoy the rhythmic chopping of vegetables, the sizzle of ingredients in a pan, and the aroma of spices filling your kitchen. Play your favorite music, listen to an audiobook with headphones, light a scented candle, or pour yourself your favorite beverage while cooking. Transforming your kitchen into a cozy, inviting space can make the experience more enjoyable.

Remember, finding joy in cooking doesn't mean you have to become a gourmet chef overnight. It's about discovering what works for you and your family, redefining what a great meal looks like, and finding moments of satisfaction in the kitchen, even on the busiest of days.



ell

Freezer Meals for Big Life Events

Meal prep can be especially helpful when you're anticipating an impending busy season—a baby's arrival, long-term medical treatment, or just an insanely busy couple of weeks or months. Having a plan in place for feeding your family can be a game changer. And guess what? Freezer meals are about to become your new best friend.

So, what exactly are freezer meals? Think of them as your secret weapon in the battle against mealtime chaos. These are meals you prep ahead of time, stash in the freezer, then pull out whenever you need a quick and easy dinner solution.

Let's break it down. Here's how to make a big batch of freezer meals all at once.

Choose your recipes. Start by selecting recipes that freeze well and are easy to reheat. Think hearty soups, stews, casseroles, and chili—anything that can be cooked low and slow or quickly in a pressure cooker.

Gather ingredients. Make a list of everything you'll need for each recipe, and then hit the grocery store to stock up. Consider doubling or even tripling recipes to maximize your efforts and ensure you have plenty of meals on hand. While you're there, be sure to pick up freezer-safe resealable bags and markers for storing and labeling.

Get to work. Set aside a block of time—several hours on a weekend perhaps—to prep your freezer meals. Chop veggies, brown meat, assemble casseroles—whatever needs to be done to get your meals ready for the freezer.

Pack it up. Once your meals are prepped, portion them into freezer-safe resealable bags. Label everything with the name of the dish, the date, and the cooking instructions so you know exactly what you're working with when mealtime rolls around.

Freeze! Lay your meals flat in the freezer if you can (to save space)—making sure to leave enough room for air circulation.

When it's time to cook, simply pull a meal out of the freezer, dump it into your slow cooker or Instant Pot, and let the magic happen. No fuss, no stress—just yummy, easy meals your family will love. With a little planning and prep work, you can ensure that your family stays happily well-fed and nourished when life gets hectic.





ell

Why Dinnertime Matters

I've never been able to fully throw in the towel on cooking. Mostly because I'm in charge of three small humans who need to eat multiple times a day, but also because I genuinely want to grow to enjoy the process. My appreciation for cooking is growing—even if slowly—but what keeps me going is remembering why I'm making the mess and putting forth all the effort in the first place. Because dinnertime matters.

Dinnertime is about more than just filling hungry bellies; it's about nourishing our bodies and our hearts. It is a time for us to come together as a family, set aside the craziness of the day, and connect. As a busy professional, wife, mother, and more, I struggle daily to balance work, life, and family. And most days around 5 p.m., the last thing I want to do is spend hours in the kitchen preparing complicated meals. I crave simplicity, efficiency, and the opportunity to unwind with my people.

In our fast-paced, activity-packed, nonstop world, finding moments to connect can be hard. Dinnertime offers a sacred slice of time for us to set aside distractions and focus on each other—whether we're seated around a beautifully set table with main dishes, sides, and dessert or standing around the kitchen, leaning against the cabinets, stuffing our faces with pizza that was just delivered. These moments of togetherness matter.

By embracing simplicity in the kitchen, we can create space for that togetherness to happen. Added bonus? We all get fed. Happy bellies. Happy hearts. Embracing the duality of not necessarily loving cooking but also really enjoying our people is how we make room for both.

Try a 'round-the-table conversation starter like asking each person to name a high and a low from the day.

ell

Perfectionism Has No Place in Your Kitchen

When it comes to meal planning and cooking, perfectionism is a problem many busy women face. As a recovering perfectionist, for years I defined “a great dinner at home” as a brand-new recipe, created entirely from scratch, presented exquisitely, and given five stars by everyone at the table. This was my expectation until I realized the truth behind the phrase “perfect is the enemy of good.” Perfection can absolutely suck the joy out of everything.

So when it comes to meal planning and cooking, remember that perfection is not the goal. While it’s natural to want to check every box with every single meal—nutritious, beautiful, and universally adored—it’s so important to give ourselves permission to let go of unrealistic expectations. Instead of aiming for gourmet dinners every night, focus on creating meals that are nourishing, satisfying, and practical for your family’s needs. It’s okay to rely on simple recipes, shortcuts, and sometimes even convenience foods—what matters most is that your family is fed and together.

Instead of striving for perfection with each meal, strive for a happy dinnertime experience in whatever way that applies to you and your family. For example, when I realized that making fancy bento box lunches for my children to take to school every day wasn’t worth my sanity, I started focusing on other ways I could make them smile when they opened their lunch boxes. I began buying cute paper napkins when I found them on sale (I have quite the collection now!). I write lunch box notes to tell them I love them and am thinking of them. When they were younger, I used cookie cutters to turn their PB&Js into dinosaurs. I even started buying unique and fun types of mini-desserts or treats for them to try with their plain old ham sandwiches, chips, and grapes.

I think it’s important to identify where your joy resides and invest your time there. That’s where we shine the most. You cook Thanksgiving dinner; I’ll set a killer table. Find your joy in the kitchen and chase it. Love baking and listening to audiobooks? Go for it. The bake sale awaits. Love slow-cooking barbecue all day and making your house smell amazing? Forget the salmon and spinach; barbecue it is! You do you. Don’t let perfection be the enemy of good.

good > perfect



ell

Rely on a Perpetual Grocery List

It sometimes seems like just as I finish one trip to the grocery store, it's time to go back. But what if I told you there's a simple solution to this never-ending cycle? Enter the magic of keeping a perpetual grocery list.

A perpetual grocery list is exactly what it sounds like—a running list of items you regularly need to buy, updated as needed and kept handy for whenever it's time to hit the store. It's like having your own personal assistant reminding you of what you need without the hassle of starting from scratch every week.

Instead of racking your brain trying to remember the staples you like to keep on hand or scrambling to jot down items as you run out the door, simply consult your list and add anything that's missing. No more starting your list from scratch each week! This saves time and mental energy, leaving you more room to focus on other important tasks.

So how do you create and maintain a perpetual grocery list? Start by taking inventory of your pantry, fridge, and freezer to identify items you use regularly, staples like milk, bread, eggs, produce, rice, pasta, and canned goods. Keep your list somewhere easily accessible—whether it's a notepad on the fridge or a note-taking app on your phone—and add to it as needed whenever you notice something running low or think of something your family needs consistently.

On the opposite page is a wonderful starting place for your perpetual grocery list. Add or remove based on your preferences.

Perpetual Grocery List

PRODUCE	DAIRY + EGGS	PROTEIN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apples <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bananas <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Berries <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Carrots <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Garlic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lemons <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lettuce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Potatoes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yellow onions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Butter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cream cheese <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Greek yogurt <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Half-and-half <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heavy whipping cream <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Milk <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shredded cheese <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sliced cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chicken breasts <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chicken thighs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chuck roast <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deli meat <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ground beef <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salmon
PANTRY STAPLES	CONDIMENTS	GRAINS + BREADS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Beans <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chicken broth <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Flour, all purpose <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Honey <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jelly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maple syrup <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Olive oil <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peanut butter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sugar <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vinegar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BBQ Sauce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dijon mustard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hot sauce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ketchup <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mayonnaise <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mustard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Olives <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pickles <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Soy sauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bread <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Old-fashioned oats <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pasta <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rice (steam-in-bags) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tortillas
SNACKS	HOUSEHOLD ITEMS	SPICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crackers <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Granola bars <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nuts <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Popcorn <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pretzels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cleaning supplies <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Freezer-safe bags <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laundry detergent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paper towels <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Toilet paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chili powder <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cumin <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Garlic powder <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Onion powder <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Oregano <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paprika <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parsley <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pepper <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salt
		BEVERAGES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coffee <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Orange juice



ell

What Doesn't Really Matter in the Kitchen

Let's chat about something super important: the cooking techniques and teachings that really don't matter in the kitchen, especially when you're juggling a million things at once. Because most of the time, getting dinner on the table is priority; being perfect and exact in your process doesn't really matter in the end. Here are a few techniques you can toss out the window and still get beautiful, delicious meals on the table.

Obsessing over knife skills. Sure, it's great if you can chop an onion like a pro, but you don't need perfect knife skills to make a delicious meal. As long as your veggies are roughly the same size, they'll cook evenly. Don't stress over precision—just chop safely and get cooking!

Getting fancy with plating. While it's fun to make your dishes look pretty, you don't need to spend hours arranging microgreens or drizzling sauces *just-so* across your plate. Your family won't care if their dinner looks like a work of art—they just want something tasty to eat. Focus on flavor over aesthetics, and save the fancy plating for special occasions.

Sticking strictly to recipes. Recipes are more like guidelines than strict rules. (This threw me for an absolute loop when I realized it; I always thought you had to be exact!) Baking requires a different level of precision to create the desired end result, but when you're cooking, feel free to improvise. Make substitutions based on what you have on hand or your family's preferences. Cooking should be flexible and fun, not stressful and rigid. Trust your instincts and get creative in the kitchen. If you're like me, this will take practice. Give yourself permission to play.

Sweating exact internal temps and cooking times. Sure, recipes might say to cook a dish for twenty minutes, but every oven is different, and personal preferences vary. Use cooking times as a rough estimate and rely on visual cues, like golden-brown edges or bubbling sauce, to know when your food is done.

Insisting on fresh ingredients. While fresh ingredients are nice, they're not always practical—especially when you're busy. Don't feel guilty about using canned, frozen, or prepackaged ingredients. They're convenient, budget friendly, and just as tasty. Embrace the shortcuts and save yourself some time and hassle.

Remember, cooking is about nourishing your family and enjoying the process. Don't let unnecessary rules or techniques stress you out. Keep it simple, trust your instincts, and enjoy learning as you go.

ell

Gadgets, Gizmos, and Little Luxuries

I absolutely love finding unnecessary necessities to make life easier, particularly in the kitchen. Below are a few items I keep in my kitchen for added convenience and ultimately less time prepping.

- **Veggie chopper:** Veggie choppers are a game changer, especially if you don't want your mascara to run while chopping onions. Simply cut veggies into medium-size pieces, lay on the blades, and press the lid down. Voilà! Perfectly cut veggies, all the same size, in just seconds.
- **Meat chopper:** Long gone are the days of trying to break up ground beef with a wooden spoon. Meat choppers break the meat up with ease and help it cook faster.
- **Scraper:** I chop my veggies on a wooden cutting board across from my stove. So when I need to transfer the chopped stuff to the pot, I often drop something on the floor. The dog loves it, but I don't love the mess. Scrapers help you pick it all up and get it where it needs to be.
- **Meat thermometer:** Fear chicken no more. Simply insert the meat thermometer to check the doneness.
- **Oil mister:** Traditional cooking sprays can contain unwanted additives, while store-bought aerosol oil sprays can be expensive and wasteful. An oil mister allows you to create your own cooking spray using your favorite oil, giving you control over the ingredients and portion size.
- **Avocado slicer:** If you love avocados but struggle with slicing and pitting them, an avocado slicer is your new best friend. It allows you to effortlessly cut, pit, and slice avocados with precision, making it easier to enjoy this delicious fruit in salads, sandwiches, and more.
- **Precut foil and parchment paper:** Precut foil and parchment paper eliminate the need (and hassle) of measuring and cutting from a roll. With perfect-sized sheets, they make cooking and baking just a little easier and more enjoyable.
- **Air fryer and slow cooker liners:** Precut, ready to go, nonstick. Need I say more?
- **Kitchen shears:** These specialty scissors allow you to chop herbs, vegetables, meat, and more while minimizing mess and cleanup.



kitchen shears

oil mister

scraper

meat thermometer

veggie chopper

meat chopper



ell

Nourishing Your Body

Have you ever felt that managing a busy life and getting meals onto the table means choosing between feeding your family something healthy *or* something convenient? I know I've felt that way. Though the term *healthy* can be defined different ways depending on who you ask and what their priorities are, here are a few universal tips for making simple, convenient meals while feeding your family foods that nourish their bodies.

When grocery shopping, prioritize organic for the Dirty Dozen.* Buying organic produce can be expensive. The Environmental Working Group's Dirty Dozen list identifies the top twelve fruits and vegetables each year with the highest pesticide residues when grown conventionally. To minimize exposure to pesticides, consider prioritizing organic options for these twelve foods:

- Apples
- Celery
- Cherries
- Grapes
- Kale
- Nectarines
- Peaches
- Pears
- Potatoes
- Spinach
- Strawberries
- Tomatoes

Eat real food. Focus on shopping the perimeter of the grocery store and eating foods that come from the earth, in lots of different colors. This ensures that you're getting the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients necessary for overall health and well-being. Choose whole foods over processed options.

Choose oils wisely. While some oils have proven to be good for the heart and to fight inflammation in the body, others can cause inflammation, which has been linked to numerous diseases. Prioritize oils high in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats like olive oil, avocado oil, and some nut oils while limiting oils high in omega-6 fatty acids, such as vegetable oils, sunflower oil, and soybean oil.

*The 2024 Dirty Dozen™, ewg.org.

ell

Additional Tips

Find a favorite olive oil. Not all olive oils are the same. If you have time and have an olive oil shop near you, pay them a visit. Many olive oil shops will allow you to taste their various offerings. Personally, I like a very mild olive oil for cooking and for dressings. More pungent, strong-flavored olive oils throw off a recipe if you ask me. Find one you like and stick with it.

Get to know your spices. I think it's helpful to understand and know your spices. One afternoon, when you have some uninterrupted free time, get out all your spices, sit down, and get to know them. Smell each of them. Taste them. Get a good loaf of French bread and some olive oil, and play around with the spices, tasting them on the bread with the oil. This will sharpen your instincts regarding which spices taste good with which foods.

Don't let chicken freak you out. I had salmonella as a child, no thanks to a contaminated jar of baby food. Though I was just a baby, I've grown up with a healthy fear of raw chicken. For years I served chicken very well done (read: DRY) or not at all. Enter the meat thermometer. Now I simply check that my chicken has reached 165 degrees internally, and I know it's fully cooked.

Fresh herbs are better, but you don't need a garden if you don't want one. In your fridge, keep small cups of store-bought fresh herbs you use often. They stay fresh longer than if you leave them in the plastic containers and taste better than dried herbs in some recipes. Basil and parsley are two good ones to have on hand.

Watch the broiler. Minding the broiler is just one of those things you don't know *until you know*. Until you've set an entire pan of nachos on fire, you just don't know how hot that broiler can get and how fast. Whenever I use my broiler, whether it's to melt cheese quickly or add a little extra crispiness, I always crack the oven door and stand right in front of the oven, watching and waiting for my food to be crisped just right.







SECTION ONE

Breakfast

ell





Breakfast

RECIPES

<i>Easy Quiche</i>	36
<i>Hashbrown Bake</i>	39
<i>Banana Pancakes</i>	40
<i>Classic French Toast</i>	43
<i>Egg Bites</i>	44
<i>Pumpkin Muffins</i>	47
<i>Slow Cooker Apple Oatmeal</i>	48
<i>Sunday Morning Casserole</i>	51
<i>Sheet Pan Pancakes</i>	52
<i>The World's Best Scrambled Eggs</i>	55
<i>Biscuits & Gravy</i>	56

ASSEMBLY MEALS

<i>Overnight Oats</i>	59
<i>Easy Breakfast Sandwiches</i>	59
<i>Strawberry Banana Smoothies</i>	59
<i>Baby Donuts</i>	60
<i>Avocado Toast</i>	60
<i>Breakfast Burritos</i>	63
<i>Yogurt Parfaits</i>	63
<i>Peanut Butter Banana Toast</i>	63
<i>Bagels with All the Fixin's</i>	64
<i>Monster Toast</i>	64
<i>Breakfast Banana Splits</i>	64

BREAKFAST

ell

Easy Quiche

Quiches are so yummy and can be customized a number of ways. I love serving quiche at brunch or delivering one to a friend who's just had a baby or is going through a hard time. This quiche is quick, simple, and bakes in no time. You can use a premade piecrust placed into your own pie plate or the kind that's already in a disposable metal pan to save a dish. You can even sneak in some chopped spinach if you'd like.



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
60 minutes



SERVINGS
8



INGREDIENTS

- 1 (9-inch) premade piecrust
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1 cup diced ham
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- Optional: 1 cup baby spinach, finely chopped

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. If you're using a crust that is not in a tin, press the crust into a greased 9-inch pie plate. Remove excess dough from edges.
3. In a mixing bowl, whisk together eggs and half-and-half. Fold in ham and cheese, and spinach, (if using).
4. Pour egg mixture into pie plate.
5. Bake for 60 minutes or until center is firm.
6. Remove from oven. Add salt and pepper to taste.
7. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

* PRO TIP

Buy premade piecrust and pre-diced ham.





BREAKFAST

ell

Hashbrown Bake

Breakfast bakes are awesome because you can assemble them ahead of time and leave them in the fridge until they're ready to be cooked. My family loves this simple egg bake for a protein-packed breakfast. You can even freeze individual pieces for a heat-and-eat option. If you want to sneak in some veggies, you can sauté chopped bell peppers and yellow onion in a little olive oil in the same pan you brown your sausage in, then add them to the eggs when you add the cheese.



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
50 minutes



SERVINGS
8 to 12

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb ground sausage
- 9 eggs
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 (20 oz) bag shredded hash brown potatoes
- Optional: 1/2 bell pepper, diced
- Optional: 1 yellow onion, chopped

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray a 9 x 13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Brown the ground sausage in a skillet over medium heat. If you are using optional veggies, add them to the skillet and cook for a couple more minutes. Remove from heat.
3. Whisk eggs and milk in a bowl, then add to baking dish.
4. Stir sausage, cheese, and hash browns into the egg mixture in the baking dish.
5. Bake for 50 minutes.
6. Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

BREAKFAST

ell

Banana Pancakes

Does anyone else start singing the Jack Johnson song when you see these words? Just me? These easy pancakes were one of my oldest's favorites when he was smaller. Now that he's a teenager (gracious), he still loves them just as much.



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
15 minutes



SERVINGS
4



INGREDIENTS

- Butter, for the pan
- 4 overripe bananas
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- Optional: sliced bananas, maple syrup, powdered sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Grease a pan with butter, and heat on medium.
2. In a mixing bowl, mash bananas with a fork.
3. Stir in eggs, flour, and baking powder until just mixed.
4. Pour 1/4 cup batter into pan. Press and shape into a circle (batter will be thick). Cook until brown, about 2 minutes. Flip to brown on the other side, about 1 minute.
5. Serve with sliced bananas, maple syrup, or powdered sugar for a sweet breakfast.





BREAKFAST

ell

Classic French Toast

Nothing hits the happy button quite like classic French toast. It's so easy to make that you can even get your kids involved. Top with powdered sugar, syrup, or your favorite berries for a delicious Sunday breakfast.



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
15 minutes



SERVINGS
4

INGREDIENTS

- 4 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 cup milk
- Butter, for the pan
- 8 slices bread
- Optional: maple syrup, powdered sugar, berries

DIRECTIONS

1. Whisk eggs, vanilla, cinnamon, and milk in a shallow dish.
2. Heat a pan or griddle over medium heat, and slide butter across it as it gets warm.
3. Dip both sides of a slice of bread into egg mixture, then add to the hot pan.
4. Cook each slice about 2 minutes per side. Remove from pan. Repeat with remaining bread slices, adding more butter to the pan as needed.
5. Top with powdered sugar, maple syrup, and/or berries.

BREAKFAST

ell

Egg Bites

I constantly find myself trying to get more protein into my kids. Egg bites are one of the easiest ways I've found. These are also a great way to use up any leftovers you have on hand—or to put that bag of spinach about to expire to good use. My kids think they're extra great served with ketchup, of course.



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
20 minutes



SERVINGS
12 egg bites

INGREDIENTS

- 8 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup baby spinach
- 1 cup diced ham
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 12-cup muffin pan with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Whisk eggs and milk in a bowl. Add salt and pepper to taste.
3. Chop spinach. Divide spinach, ham, and cheese evenly into muffin cups.
4. Pour an equal amount of egg mixture into each cup.
5. Bake for 20 minutes.

* PRO TIP

Buy pre-diced ham.





BREAKFAST

ell

Pumpkin Muffins

The nostalgia of pumpkin muffins is very real for me. I can smell these, warm and straight from the oven, just writing this! Because this recipe calls for a box of cake mix, these are a little more of a dessert-type breakfast. But who doesn't love a treat every now and then, especially on a cool fall morning?



PREP TIME
10 minutes



COOK TIME
20 minutes



SERVINGS
2 dozen muffins



INGREDIENTS

- 1 (15.25 oz) box spiced cake mix
- 1 (15 oz) can pure pumpkin
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray two 12-cup muffin tins with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Mix cake mix and pumpkin together. Divide batter evenly among muffin tins.
3. Sprinkle brown sugar on top of each muffin.
4. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle of a muffin comes out clean.

BREAKFAST

ell

Slow Cooker Apple Oatmeal

Thank goodness for slow cookers. I love to start these overnight oats after supper, while cleaning the kitchen. I turn on the slow cooker just before bed (I love using the auto shut-off feature so these don't overcook). The smell when you wake up in the morning is so yummy and cozy. These are great for cold winter mornings and getting the kids out the door quickly. Add chopped nuts, raisins, or a pinch of salt if you're feeling fancy! Also, try a slow cooker liner—your arm muscles will thank you later when you're not scraping cooked oatmeal off the sides.

 **PREP TIME**
10 minutes

 **COOK TIME**
6 hours

 **SERVINGS**
4 to 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup steel-cut oats
- 4 cups milk
- 2 apples
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- Optional: sliced apple, to top

DIRECTIONS

1. Spray a slow cooker with nonstick cooking spray or line with a slow cooker liner.
2. Peel and chop apples into large chunks.
3. Mix oats, milk, apples, brown sugar, and cinnamon in slow cooker.
4. Cover and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours or until liquid is mostly absorbed. Be careful not to overcook.
5. In the morning, spoon oatmeal into bowls, sprinkle with brown sugar, and serve.

Swap in blueberries, bananas, or peanut butter for a twist!





BREAKFAST

ell

Sunday Morning Casserole

This recipe, shared on my friend Annie's blog, *Home of Malones*, is our favorite Sunday morning breakfast. We love it so much, in fact, that we have it on Christmas morning. It's so easy to prepare that my kids can make it on their own.

 **PREP TIME**
10 minutes

 **COOK TIME**
30 minutes

 **SERVINGS**
8 to 12



INGREDIENTS

- 1 (8 oz) can crescent roll dough
- 1 lb ground sausage or diced cooked ham
- 9 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 9 x 13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Unroll crescent dough in bottom of baking dish.
3. If using sausage, brown it in a skillet over medium heat until it is cooked through, then drain it and place it on top of dough. If using ham, place it on top of the dough.
4. Whisk eggs, then pour them on top of the sausage and dough.
5. Top with shredded cheese.
6. Bake for 30 minutes.

PRO TIP

Try the Jimmy Dean Maple Premium Pork Sausage. It is *chef's kiss*.