

## Making Cooking Easier

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One key to saving time with home cooking is batch cooking. Batch cooking means preparing food ahead of time in large batches to be eaten later as meals or to be used as ingredients for multiple meals or snacks. Batch cooking allows you to maximize the time spent in the kitchen by preparing multiple meals in about the same amount of time it would take to cook just one meal and it provides versatility by producing meal components can be multipurposed into many dishes.

Here are several tips to help make the most of batch cooking:

1. *Make a plan.* Set aside some time during your week to plan what you want to eat for meals and snacks, select some recipes or meal ideas and create some menus. You don't have to plan the entire week, start with a few days' worth of meals you know you will enjoy and that are easy to prepare and keep it simple to start. There are a number of online resources for healthy recipe ideas, when choosing a recipe, be sure to use whole food (*not* processed) ingredients that are mainly plant based such as the recipe at the end of this column.
2. *Pick a method.* There are a few ways to approach batch cooking. You can either double or triple the recipes you select, or you can make batches of ingredients that you will assemble later. Most foods will last in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days or you can freeze them for longer storage times. As far as cooking meal components, as long as you cook the ingredients with no sauces and little seasoning, you will be able to repurpose them many times over.
3. *Think about repurposing.* The same ingredient can be used for multiple meals. For example, quinoa can be made in advance, later you can add it to hot cereal for breakfast, add to a salad for lunch, and serve as a side dish for dinner. When you begin your meal prep, decide if you are cooking meals, meal components or some of both to extend the options.

4. *Prep wisely.* Read over the recipes before you begin to cook, look for common ingredients. If you have 2 recipes that call for the same ingredient, such as chopped onions, prep them at the same time. This will make your cooking time more efficient. You can even prep ingredients you know you'll use often, such as minced garlic or fresh squeezed lemon juice and store them for later use. Taking a little effort upfront really pays big dividends later when you are pressed for time and find you have the ingredients you need already prepared.

Just as important as what you cook is how you store your batched cooked meals. Here are some tips for convenient and safe storage.

## Tips on Storing Your Batch-Cooked Foods

### Smart Storage

For ease of use, you'll want to store your meals how you plan to eat them. It's helpful to prepackage your meals or snacks into serving sized containers, this way you can grab and go, and it also helps with portion control. Have your storage containers, masking tape, and a marker on hand so you can label your meals with the item, date, and quantity.

Foods that you plan to eat within 3 to 4 days can be refrigerated. Everything else can be frozen with the exception of foods with high water contents such as celery, delicate lettuces, cucumbers, radishes, artichokes, eggplant, and potatoes.

It's best to freeze foods immediately and keep at least at 0°F to retain their vitamin content, color, flavor, and texture.

### Safe Storage

Storing your food in glass containers is preferable to plastic. Glass is clear, environmentally friendly, holds heat well, goes from freezer to table, doesn't absorb smells, and is very durable. If you use plastic

containers, try to limit to cold storage and transporting food, not reheating.

To understand how long specific foods can be frozen, a freezer storage chart (0°F) can be found through the US Department of Health and Human Services at <https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts>

*Note.* Freezer storage is for quality only. Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely.

In summary, healthy batch cooking can make your life easier by saving you time, reducing stress and giving you more healthy options to choose from when you want them.

With all the health benefits of home cooking, batch cooking and advance meal preparation is an excellent skill to teach our patients to make healthy eating accessible throughout the week.

**Resource:** [Home Meal Preparation: A Powerful Medical Intervention - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)