

Productivity & Organization for Women

Lesson Six

Today we begin tackling one of the most important areas of our home—the kitchen. As much as I would like to say that you can do this once and be done forever, that is not how our bodies work. We need to go to the store, stock our kitchen, make meals, and then do it all over again!

With some tricks and tools, you can make this process slightly less painful!

If you have very few mouths to feed, you may be able to get away with shopping only every two to three weeks. I've even successfully done once-a-month shopping for a time. It means being willing to only eat “fresh” items during the first week, but if you are willing to go that route, I highly recommend it.

If you have more mouths to feed (or teenage boys!), you will need to grocery shop more often. The key is to plan your list carefully, and never, I mean *never*, go to the store for just one or two items. I will scrap an entire recipe rather than go to the store for that one ingredient that I forgot. Extra trips to the store not only waste your valuable time, but they also could cost you more money if you grab more unnecessary things while you are there.

The planning process for grocery shopping and meal planning begins with these steps:

1. Know the staples that you need to buy each week, two weeks, and month.
2. Schedule your grocery day and try to stick to it.
3. Know what is already in your pantry, fridge, and freezer.
4. Compile your favorite recipes all in one location (digital or physical).
5. List the ingredients for these meals on your grocery list (digital or physical).

Your assignment today is:

1. Write down the staples that you need to buy each week on the following page. Do not fill in any other section of this meal planning tool. If you would prefer to use an app, see additional resources.
2. Put your grocery shopping day on your calendar.

Additional Resources:

[Once a Month Shopping: Save More By Shopping Less \(blog post\)](#)

[How Once a Month Grocery Shopping Changed My Life \(blog post\)](#)

[Plans Your Weekly Meals, Stress Free \(blog post\)](#)

[7 Grocery List Apps to Simplify Family Meal Planning \(blog post\)](#)

My Meal Plan - Weeks 1 & 2

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Week 1 Shopping

Shelf Items

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Produce

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Refrigerated

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Week 2 Shopping

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Refrigerated

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Frozen

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Lesson Seven

Having a meal plan is the number one way that I save time at home. Although it takes some prep work, the time saved on work days far outweighs the inconvenience of a few hours on one weekend. In general, I plan meals for work days, and leave the weekends open for left overs or going out to eat. That means that I need to think about (approximately) 20 dinners each month.

Years ago I began preparing freezer meals. They were generally easy to prepare and then throw in the oven or on the stove after work. There are many amazing freezer meal sites that are in the links below. More recently, however, I have embraced freezer crockpot meals. These meals require even less preparation, and you just stick them in the crockpot before work... meaning that your dinner is ready to go when you get home. Frozen crockpot meals are such a time saver! Because it is very easy to throw in frozen veggies to the meal, I even eat more vegetables with these meals.

Not every day is a crockpot meal day. I vary things by having pastas on Mondays and pizza on Fridays. But even these meals are relatively quick and easy to prepare, with ingredients that are always on my staples grocery list.

When preparing your meals for the month, consider whether you want to eat the same meals twice per month. I have found that repeating meals twice in a month is a huge time saver for preparation.

Your assignment today is:

1. Find 7-14 great recipes that your family would happily eat each month.
2. Write a meal into each section of the meal planning tool. Remember that easy box meals and left overs count too! Don't forget about side dishes and veggies!
3. Make a note next to every recipe that can be frozen (F) or put into a crock pot (CP).
4. Share one of your recipes on Facebook group or with me!

Additional Resources for Frozen Recipes:

[31 Crockpot Freezer Meals for Busy Weeknights](#) (blog post)

[10 Freezer Meals in an Hour](#) (blog post)

[20 Freezer Meals in Four Hours](#) (blog post)

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Lesson Eight

Now it is time to break down the recipes that you have chosen. Gather the recipes into one place (either in print or saved into one folder on your computer) and write down ingredients.

As you write down your ingredients, I recommend a few tricks to make things easier:

1. Group ingredients by aisle in your supermarket. If you don't know what aisle these are on yet, make note next time you are there and rearrange the list accordingly.
2. Highlight the staples that you need to buy every (or nearly every) week. These should have been added to the list on day one of this week.
3. Calculate the recipes that you want to double. I recommend doubling ALL frozen meals, so that you have extras in the freezer for those days when you forgot to make plans. For every meal that you are doubling, write down twice the amount of ingredients needed.

Your assignment today is:

1. Write down the ingredients needed for your week one and week two meals. Don't forget about side dishes and veggies!

Additional Resources:

[Free Printable Meal Planner](#)

[Free Printable Grocery List](#)

[Free Meal Planner](#)

[Editable Grocery List](#)

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Lesson Nine

You are now an expert at meal planning! You have two weeks of meals planned and you are ready to plan weeks 3-4.

Secrets to my meal planning include:

1. Include the same type of meal on the same day of the week (i.e. a different type of pasta every Monday).
2. Repeat meals that the family loves every week (i.e. pizza every Friday).
3. Allow for blank spots for left overs and/or going out to eat.
4. Realize that frozen meals can be extremely flexible. If you make too many, use the extra next month (less to buy and prepare!)
5. Know that making this plan doesn't mean you always need to stick to it. Be prepared, but be flexible by shifting meals around when needed.

Your assignment today is:

1. Choose choose 7-14 more recipes. Repeat any favorites from the first two weeks of the month if you'd like.
2. Write them in the weeks 3-4 meal planner.
3. List all of your staple ingredients that you must buy each week/every two weeks.
4. List all of the ingredients needed for the meals.

Additional Resources:

[17 Free Printable Freezer Meal Plans and Grocery Lists](#) (blog post)

[Freezer Meals](#) (blog post)

Not free but I love this woman's crockpot meal recipes. She lays everything out really well to make the process easy: [Lauren Greutman's Meal Plans](#)

My Meal Plan - Weeks 3 & 4

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Week 3 Shopping

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Week 4 Shopping

Shelf Items

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Lesson Ten

The meal plans that you have created (weeks 1-2 and 3-4) will be your foundation for your meals throughout the year. Each month, print out these meal plans again and re-use. There will be no more fretting over what to buy and make each week and no more extra trips to the grocery store.

Hopefully, several of the meals that you put onto your meal plan are frozen meals. There are two ways to prepare these:

1. Buy double (or triple) of the ingredients and do a massive “frozen meal prep day” during the weekend for all of your frozen meals
2. Buy double (or triple) of the ingredients and make them in small doses (one recipe at a time).

Regardless of which option that you choose, plan to use the extra freezer meals during weekends, with guests, or on next month’s menu.

Hints for easier freezer meal preparation:

1. Have a large supply of freezer gallon bags ready.
2. Before filling, use a sharpie to label the bags with the recipe name, what it should be served with, and any cooking directions.
3. Put all of the same ingredients into bags before moving on (i.e. put chicken in all of the bags before adding beans into all of the bags, etc.)

Your assignment today is:

1. If needed, go through your freezer. Label and date items. Throw out unlabeled or unknown foods. Organize your freezer to make room for your new meals!
2. Cut your grocery list page in half to shop for week one. If you are up for it, bring the whole page and shop for two weeks!
3. Prepare your freezer meals in advance.
4. Write down your shopping and meal prep days for the rest of the month.

Additional resources:

[A Beginners Guide to Freezer Cooking](#)

[How to Properly Freeze Food](#)

[A Beginner’s Guide to Freezer Cooking](#)

[Homemade Freezer Meals 101](#)