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## Cooking ahead can save you time and money

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There are only so many hours in the day. Sometimes, especially after a long workday, cooking doesn't seem like a worthwhile use of those hours.

No problem. You can invest some weekend time.

Preparing and cooking some food well in advance can save you cooking time during the week. It may also help you reduce your grocery bill, eat better, and stay away from fast food.

Here are some strategies to try:

- **Premade pasta.** Boil up a pound or two of pasta and store it in the fridge. For dinner, just microwave a couple scoops. You can change up the toppings for variety. One night, add a can of marinara pasta sauce and some spices. The next, toss the pasta in lemon juice with some chopped veggies.

- **Slow cooked savings.** A slow cooker can turn a large, inexpensive cut of meat into tender, tasty ingredients. For example, put in a pork shoulder or whole chicken with 12 ounces of liquid (beer works great). After six hours in the slow cooker, you can easily shred the cooked meat with forks.

Separate the meat into several bags and store it in the freezer. You can use the meat later on in a variety of dishes like sandwiches, stews, and salads.

- **Lunch made easy.** If you (or your kids) like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, just take a loaf of bread and make a stack of sandwiches Sunday night. Wrap each one in foil and throw them in the freezer. Then grab one each morning. It will thaw out by the time lunch rolls around.

- **Put together a salad kit.** You can put together a big bowl of salad on Sunday and eat your way through it during the week. Get the chopping and mixing out of the way when it doesn't feel like a chore. During the week, add some dressing (and maybe some of that shredded, slow cooked meat discussed above) and enjoy.

- **Repurpose leftovers.** Plan your weekly menu in advance so you can repurpose leftovers day-to-day. Pan drippings from Monday can be used to make gravy on Tuesday. Leftover chicken from Wednesday can be sliced thin for stir fry on Thursday. If you find yourself with extra food after dinner, think of a clever way to use it later.

### Try it with your favorites

You can find your own ways to save time and money. Take a look at your favorite dishes and figure out which cooking steps can be done in advance. Go through your recipe book and find meals that share ingredients so you can buy in bulk. Once you think ahead, it can be easy to cook ahead and save.

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### Save safely

When reheating food, make sure to follow health and safety guidelines. For example, most meats should be reheated to at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Visit [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov)\* for more on how to handle food.

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