

Freeze Now, Eat Later! Freezer Meal Workshop

Megan Erickson | SDSU Extension Nutrition Field Specialist

What is Freezer Meal Planning?

Planning meals ahead of time that can be frozen for later. After preparing, labeling, and freezing, these meals can be reheated in the future to conveniently provide families a home cooked meal regardless of their schedule.

Why Freeze Meals?

Freezer meals provide families with the option to have a home cooked meal with minimal effort on busy days. Here are some of the added benefits:

- **Save Money** – reduce food waste, eat at home instead of a restaurant
- **Save Time** – dinner is ready when you get home, consolidate shopping trips and food preparation steps
- **Eat Healthier** – people typically eat healthier when eating at home rather than eating out
- **Increase Family Meal Time** – enjoy family meals together

Basic Steps for a Freezer Workshop

1. Select recipes
2. Arrange for a workspace with enough counter space
 - a. Tip – If preparing more than one meal, have stations where participants can rotate preparing separate meals.
3. Invite participants
4. Gather supplies and ingredients
5. Guide participants in prepping meals using the 4 rules of food safety
6. Portion meals into freezer containers
7. Label and date containers
8. Clean workspace
9. Evaluation

Supplies

- Large garbage container for waste
- Food preparation supplies – large mixing bowls, mixing spoons, sharp knives, cutting boards, sauce pans, 9 x 13 inch foil pans, spatulas, can openers, dry measuring cups, liquid measuring cups, measuring spoons, potholders, strainer, colander, gloves
- Storage supplies – sharpie marker, labels, masking tape or stickers for labels, freezer containers, freezer bags
- Hand washing station – sink, soap, disposable towels
- First aid kit

What do participants bring?

- Groceries from list
- Freezer bags
- Bag/tote to carry out meals

Clean. Separate. Cook. Chill.

Following these four simple steps (Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill) can help protect your family from food poisoning at home.



Hand washing

1. Wet hands with water
2. Apply soap
3. Lather well
4. Rub your hands, palm to palm, vigorously for at least 20 seconds. *Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, thumbs, between your fingers, and under your fingernails.
5. Rinse well
6. Dry hands with clean towel
7. Use towel to turn off faucet

Wash Produce (Prevents spread of harmful substances)

- Rinse produce under running water
- Use brush for grooved produce
- Remove any dirt

Safe Minimum Internal Temperature Chart

Use a food thermometer to check what meat has reached a safe internal temperature that is hot enough to kill harmful germs that cause food poisoning.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

“Is it *done* yet?”

You can't tell by looking. Use a food thermometer to be sure.

USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

145°F	145°F	160°F	160°F	165°F
with a 3-minute rest time				
Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb Steaks, Roasts & Chops	Fish	Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb Ground	Egg Dishes	Turkey, Chicken & Duck Whole, Pieces & Ground

www.FoodSafety.gov

USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline
1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

Food Safety and Inspection Service

CLEAN SEPARATE COOK CHILL

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.
Reprinted September 2016

Cooling Food

- Foods should be cooled as quickly as possible. It should not be left out no longer than 2 hours to prevent the growth of bacteria that could cause foodborne illnesses.
- It is not recommended to put hot food straight into the freezer. The hot food will warm the other foods and could raise the temperature of the freezer.
- Never stack packages in the freezer. Instead, spread them out until they are completely frozen, then stack.

Menu: use underlined main ingredient → to make other recipes

Marinara Meat Sauce- Master Mix →

- Classic Lasagna
- Baked Ziti with Four Cheeses
- Zesty Chili

Homemade Taco Helper

Tex-Mex Enchiladas

Orange Teriyaki Chicken

Grocery List

Canned & Packaged Goods

- 7 cans (28oz each) peeled tomatoes with juice
- 2 (6 oz) cans tomato paste
- 3 cans (15 oz each) chili beans
- 1 cup stewed or diced canned tomatoes
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans
- 2 jars (10 ½ oz) salsa

Staples

- Minced garlic
- Dried basil
- Bay leaves
- Granulated sugar
- Black pepper
- Dried parsley
- Dried oregano
- Dried cilantro
- Chili powder
- Ground cumin
- Nonfat dry milk
- Cornstarch
- Onion powder
- Garlic powder
- Soy sauce
- Olive/canola oil
- Ground ginger
- Hot sauce

Fruits & Vegetables

- 3-4 large onions
- 1 head garlic
- 1 green pepper
- 1 jalapeno pepper

Breads & Cereals

- 1 lb lasagna noodles
- 13¼ oz. whole grain ziti or penne pasta
- Instant brown rice
- 8 large whole wheat tortillas

Dairy Foods

- 1 container (15 oz) low-fat cottage cheese
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 ½ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 4 cups low-fat shredded cheese (four-cheese blend)
- Butter or margarine
- 1½ cups low-fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 cups low-fat Monterey Jack cheese, shredded

Protein*

- 3 lbs lean (greater than 90%) ground beef or turkey
- 2 eggs
- 9-10 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

Frozen Foods

- 1 can (6 oz) orange juice concentrate

Freezing Supplies

- 1-gallon freezer bags
- Heavy-duty tin foil
- 3 – 9 x 13 inch foil baking pans
- Freezer-safe containers
- Sharpie Marker
- Labels/Masking tape

* Purchase last to ensure food safety and quality. Use plastic bags at the grocery store to keep raw meat and poultry separate from other items in your shopping cart

Additional Tips

- Prepare multiple batches of main ingredients, such as beef, pork or chicken. If you are cooking up ground beef, cut down on time by browning two pounds instead of one, then freeze the extra pound for future meals like tacos. Cutting out the most time-consuming portion of meal preparation!
- For budget friendly meals, pay attention to sales at your grocery store. Choose meals that you can prepare and freeze at a lower cost.
- Line casseroles and pans so that the dish prepared may be taken out of the container once frozen. Once frozen, remove it from the container, wrap it and return it to the freezer. This prevents having to have a large number of pans/dishes.
- Date and label the food. Provide directions for re-heating within the package as well as packaging extras in the wrapped item, i.e. a package of shredded cheese with the frozen package of lasagna so when you are ready to take it out, you have the topping available.
- If an item is going to be baked, you will generally need to thaw the item in the refrigerator 24 hours before cooking.
- Keep a list of items in the freezer so they can be eaten in a reasonable time. Generally, it is best to consume frozen foods within one year of freezing them.

Recipes

Marinara Meat Sauce- Master Mix



Ingredients

- 2 large onions, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 lbs lean (greater than 90%) ground beef or turkey
- 7 cans (28 oz each) OR 24½ cups peeled tomatoes, with juice
- 2 (6 oz) cans tomato paste
- 3 Tbsp dried basil (or ½ cup fresh, chopped)
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 1½ tsp black pepper

Directions

1. In an 8-quart saucepan, brown ground beef over medium heat.
2. Add onions and garlic.
3. Cook until onions are done (about 8 minutes), stirring often.
4. Chill rapidly.
5. Use in other marinara meat sauce master mix recipes or place portions in freezer-quality bags, label, and freeze immediately.

Yields 25½ cups

Classic Lasagna



Ingredients

- 1 container (15 oz) low-fat cottage cheese
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 Tbsp dried parsley (¼ cup fresh, chopped)
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 6 cups marinara meat sauce master mix
- 1 lb lasagna noodles (about 15 noodles)
- 1½ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded

Directions

1. Cook lasagna noodle for approximately 5 minutes and drain.
2. In a medium bowl, combine first five ingredients.
3. In a 9 x 13 inch foil baking pan spread 1 cup of the marinara meat sauce master mix in the bottom of the pan. Layer 5 lasagna noodles, 1/3 of the remaining marinara meat sauce and 1 cup of the cottage cheese mixture. Repeat layers.
4. Top with final noodles and remaining marinara meat sauce. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese. Cover pan with foil, seal, label and freeze.

To cook: Thaw in refrigerator overnight. Bake unthawed lasagna, loosely covered with foil, at 350 degrees F for 1½ hours until 165 degrees F. Allow to set 10 minutes before cutting.

Yields 8 servings

Baked Ziti with Four Cheeses



Ingredients

- 13¼ oz. whole grain ziti or penne pasta
- 9 cups marinara meat sauce master mix
- 4 cups low-fat shredded cheese (four-cheese blend)

Directions

1. Cook pasta 5 minutes until tender but not quite done, and drain.
2. In large bowl, combine pasta, marinara meat sauce, and cheese.
3. Place in a 9 x 13-inch foil baking pan, cool, cover with foil, seal, label and freeze in pan. Recipe may be divided and frozen in individual servings.

To cook: Thaw in the refrigerator for 24 hours. Cover loosely with foil and bake at 350 degrees F for 1½ hours until 165 degrees F.

Yields 8 servings

Zesty Chili



Ingredients

- 1 Tbsp butter or margarine
- 1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced OR 1-2Tbsp canned (wear gloves when handling jalapeño)
- 2 Tbsp dried cilantro
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 5 cups marinara meat sauce master mix
- 3 cans (15 oz each) chili beans

Directions

1. In an 8-quart pan, melt butter over medium heat.
2. Add green pepper and onion; cook 5 minutes.
3. Add jalapeño pepper, cilantro, chili powder and cumin and cook 2 minutes, stirring.
4. Add meat and beans, simmer 20 minutes and stir often.
5. Cool, seal, label and freeze in a freezer safe container.

Yields 8 servings

Homemade Taco Helper



Ingredients

- 1 lb lean (greater than 90%) ground beef or turkey
- 2½ cups hot water
- 1 cup stewed or diced canned tomatoes
- 1 sauce packet
- 3 Tbsp nonfat dry milk
- 1 Tbsp corn starch
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 cup instant brown rice
- 1½ cups low-fat cheddar cheese, shredded

Directions

1. Brown ground beef in a large skillet; drain.
2. Add hot water, tomatoes, rice and sauce packet. Bring mixture to a boil. Cover and simmer on low about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until rice is cooked.
3. In the last few minutes of cook time, stir in 1 cup cheese; cover pan. When rice is cooked and cheese is melted, turn off heat and uncover. Top with remaining ½ cup of cheese.
4. Let mixture stand, uncovered, about 5 minutes. Mixture will thicken as it stands.

Freezer meal option: Place in one large freezer bag or divide into individual servings. Thaw in refrigerator for 24 hours. Heat in sauce pan or in microwave until temperature reaches 165 degrees F. Add 1 Tbsp water if the mixture is dry. Top with additional cheese as needed.

Yields 5 servings of 1 cup

Tex-Mex Enchiladas



Ingredients

- 1 can (15 oz) black beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 tsp dried cilantro or parsley (OR 2 Tbsp fresh, chopped)
- 1 jar (10½ oz) salsa
- 3 cups of shredded chicken (about 3-4 breasts)
- 2 cups low-fat Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
- 8 large whole wheat tortillas
- 1 jar (10½ oz) salsa (optional topping when reheated)

Directions

1. Spray a 9 x 13-inch foil pan with cooking spray.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine black beans, chicken, cilantro/parsley, 1 cup cheese and 1 jar of salsa.
3. Fill each tortilla with ½ cup of chicken mixture. Roll and place seam side down in baking pan.
4. Sprinkle remaining cheese over enchiladas.
5. Cover with foil, seal, label, and freeze. Once enchiladas are frozen, they can be wrapped individually.

To cook: Thaw for 24 hours in the refrigerator. Cover pan loosely with foil and bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Remove foil and bake 15 minutes longer to 165 degrees F. Individual servings can also be reheated in the microwave.

Optional: Spoon additional jar of salsa over top.

Yields 8 servings

Orange Teriyaki Chicken



Ingredients

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 3 Tbsp chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp olive or canola oil
- ½ tsp ground pepper
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- ½ tsp hot sauce
- 1 can (6 oz) orange juice concentrate
- 6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

Directions

1. Combine all ingredients except chicken.
2. Place chicken breasts in freezer bag and pour marinade over chicken.
3. Freeze in gallon bag, date and label.

To cook: Thaw for 24 hours in the refrigerator. Cook chicken until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees F. Serve with a side of brown rice and veggie.

Yields 6 servings