

The Family Weeknight Meal Planner

Simple dinners, one weekly shop
and calmer evenings at the table.

PLAN · SHOP · PREP · COOK · PACK

7 original family dinners + six printable worksheets

STUDIO SAMPLE · NOT DIETITIAN-REVIEWED · NOT MEDICAL ADVICE



Dinner, sorted before the day gets busy.

For families who want real food on the table on weeknights, without starting from a blank page every evening.

The hardest part of a family dinner is rarely the cooking. It is the question at five o'clock: *what are we having?*, asked when everyone is tired and hungry. This planner moves that decision to one calm moment each week. You plan a handful of dinners, shop once, cook a few things ahead and repeat the meals your family already enjoys, with a little room for something new.



By the end, you will have...

A family plate pattern, a weeknight rhythm, a shop-by-aisle list, a batch-cook plan, a working freezer, calmer ways to handle picky eating and six printable tools.

How to use this edition

Read pages 4-9 to plan the week. Use pages 10-13 to stock, prep and store food safely. Cook from pages 14-21. Pages 22-24 cover picky eating and lunchboxes, and the worksheets on pages 25-30 are ready to print.

A STUDIO SAMPLE, READ THIS FIRST

Created by Forgewick in September 2026 to show the quality of our ebook work. It is general family food-planning information, not medical or dietetic advice, and it has not been reviewed by a registered dietitian. If a child has an allergy, a medical condition or a feeding or growth concern, follow their health professional's advice. Illustrations are original and recipes contain no nutrient analysis.

Four sections. Calmer weeknights.

Follow the whole guide, or use the linked sections to go straight to what you need tonight.

01	Plan the week	04
The family plate, a 20-minute rhythm, theme nights, a worked week and a shop-by-aisle list.		

02	Stock, prep and store	10
Cupboard and freezer staples, a batch-cook Sunday, freezer meals and food safety.		

03	Cook: seven family dinners	14
Kids in the kitchen, then seven original, mild and budget-friendly weeknight recipes.		

04	The family table + tools	22
Picky-eating strategies, a lunchbox builder and six printable worksheets.		

The aim is not a perfect dinner. It is a dinner that happens, most nights, with less stress for everyone at the table.

Plan once. Shop once. Cook less often.

The planner works as a weekly loop that gets quicker every time you repeat it.

01 Start with the week you actually have

Look at the calendar first: after-school clubs, late shifts, a night with only one adult at home. Busy nights get the fastest meal or a freezer meal; calmer nights get the recipe that makes leftovers.

02 Choose five dinners, not seven

Plan five cooked dinners and leave two nights for leftovers, a backup meal or eating out. A theme for each night (page 7) makes choosing quicker.

03 Shop once, by aisle

Check the cupboard, fridge and freezer, then write one list grouped by aisle (Worksheet 2). One main shop a week saves time and cuts impulse buys.

04 Prep a little ahead

An hour at the weekend, or twenty minutes the night before, covers most of the chopping and a sauce or two (page 11).

05 Keep what worked

Log family favourites on Worksheet 6 and they become next month's rotation. Planning gets faster each week.

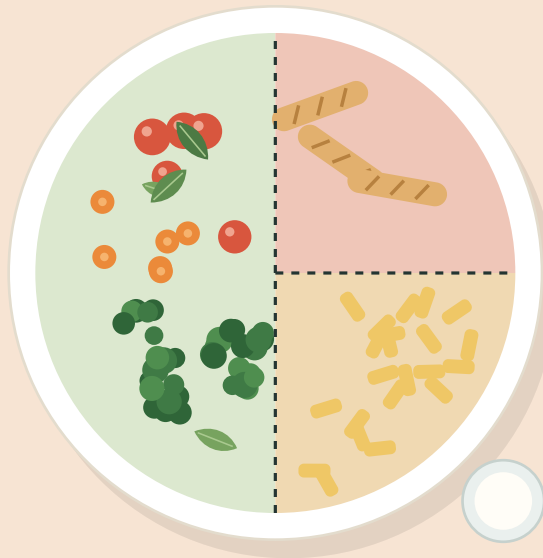
USE THE WORKSHEETS YOUR WAY

Print them, slip them into a plastic sleeve and use a dry-wipe pen, or copy the prompts into a notebook or a phone note. The plan only needs to be good enough to follow.



Build a family plate.

One simple pattern for the whole table, from age two to adult.



- **About half: vegetables + fruit**
Fresh, frozen or tinned all count. Include one the children usually eat.
- **About a quarter: grains + starches**
Pasta, rice, bread, potatoes or tortillas. Choose wholegrain often.
- **About a quarter: protein**
Beans, lentils, eggs, fish, chicken, lean mince or tofu.
- **Plus: milk or yogurt**
Or a fortified alternative, with the meal or across the day.

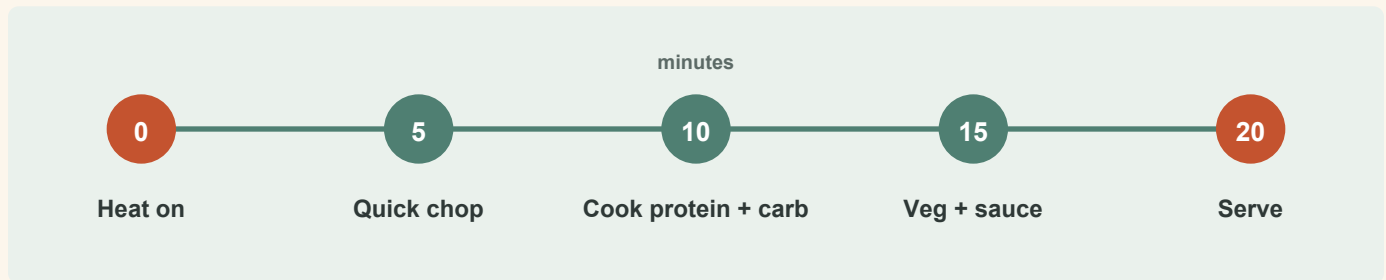
This follows common healthy-eating guidance. MyPlate suggests filling half your plate with fruit and vegetables and making half your grains whole grains [1]. The NHS Eatwell Guide says fruit and vegetables, and starchy foods, should each make up just over a third of what we eat. It applies from age two: after that, children can eat the same foods as the rest of the family in these proportions. Children under two have different needs. [2]

BALANCE OVER THE WEEK, NOT EVERY PLATE

The Eatwell Guide notes that you do not need to achieve the balance with every meal; aim for it over a day or even a week. [2] Some nights will be pasta with a side of peas. That still counts.

The 20-minute weeknight rhythm.

Most dinners in this planner follow the same four moves. Learn the rhythm once and every recipe gets faster.



01 Heat first (minute 0)

Before anything else, switch on the oven, boil the kettle for the pasta pot or heat the pan. Heat is the slowest ingredient.

02 Chop the minimum (minutes 0-5)

Use vegetables chopped on prep day, frozen vegetables or tinned beans. A child can wash vegetables or set the table now.

03 One pan, one pot or one tray (minutes 5-15)

Cook the protein and the carb together where you can. A traybake, a one-pot pasta or a pan of fried rice means less to watch and less to wash.

04 Serve family-style (minutes 15-20)

Put the dishes in the middle and let everyone serve themselves, with help for little ones. It saves plating time and lets children decide how much to take (page 22). [10]

SOME RECIPES TAKE LONGER

The chili and the lentil bolognese simmer for half an hour, so cook them on a calmer night or on prep day and reheat them on a busy one. The rhythm is a target, not a stopwatch.

Give each night a theme.

Themes shrink the question from “what shall we have?” to “which pasta?”, and give children something to look forward to.

Night	Theme	From this planner	Easy variations
Mon	Pasta night	One-pot tomato pasta (p16) or lentil bolognese (p20)	Pesto pasta with peas; tuna and sweetcorn pasta
Tue	Wrap + taco night	Sheet-pan chicken fajitas (p15)	Bean quesadillas; chicken wraps from leftovers
Wed	Pot night	Mild veggie chili (p17)	Soup and bread; baked potatoes with toppings
Thu	Rice + noodle night	Veggie egg fried rice (p19)	Noodle stir-fry; rice bowls with leftovers
Fri	Fish or fakeaway	Fish-finger tacos (p18)	Flatbread pizzas; oven chips and baked fish
Sat	Breakfast for dinner	Veggie frittata + toast (p21)	Pancakes with yogurt and fruit; beans on toast
Sun	Batch cook + leftovers	Cook for the week (p11)	Roast with extra vegetables for Monday

Build a four-week rotation

Once you have three or four family-approved dinners for each theme, write them on the rotation grid (Worksheet 3). Twenty dinners on rotation means nobody eats the same meal more than about once a month, and planning becomes picking from a list.

Page numbers point to the recipes in this planner. Move any theme to suit your family's week.

A worked family week.

A fictional family of four (two adults, children aged 4 and 9) with two late nights. Adapt it to yours.

Day	Dinner	Prep ahead	Also covers
Sun	Batch cook: lentil bolognese + mild veggie chili	Chop veg for both pots and for Tuesday	Two portions of chili to freeze
Mon	Lentil bolognese with spaghetti	Cooked on Sunday	Bolognese for a lunch flask
Tue	Sheet-pan chicken fajitas (late club night)	Peppers and onions sliced on Sunday	Chicken for Wednesday's lunchbox wraps
Wed	Mild veggie chili with rice	Chili from the fridge; cook extra rice	Extra rice, cooled within 1 hour, for Thursday
Thu	Veggie egg fried rice	Uses Wednesday's chilled rice	A fridge clear-out night
Fri	Fish-finger tacos	Shred the slaw in the morning	Nothing needed
Sat	Breakfast for dinner: frittata + toast	None	A frittata slice for Monday

Why it works

Two dinners cooked on Sunday cover three weeknights. The late-club night gets a traybake with ten minutes of hands-on time. Thursday clears the fridge, and Saturday is quick, cheap and popular. Beans and lentils stretch the budget further than meat alone.

Fictional teaching example. It does not describe a real family, a prescribed diet or a result.

Shop by aisle.

The shopping list for the worked week, grouped the way most supermarkets are laid out.

FRUIT + VEG

- ☐ Peppers, mixed colours (6)
- ☐ Onions (6), garlic (1 bulb)
- ☐ Carrots (1 kg), celery (2 sticks)
- ☐ Cucumber (1), lettuce (1)
- ☐ Small red cabbage
- ☐ Cherry tomatoes (250 g)
- ☐ Spinach (1 bag), spring onions
- ☐ Limes (3)
- ☐ Apples, bananas, grapes
- ☐ Satsumas or other fruit

MEAT, FISH, EGGS + DAIRY

- ☐ Chicken breast or thigh fillets (500 g)
- ☐ White fish fillets (400 g)
- ☐ Eggs (15)
- ☐ Grated cheddar (250 g)
- ☐ Plain yogurt (500 g)
- ☐ Milk (2 litres)

CUPBOARD

- ☐ Spaghetti and pasta shapes
- ☐ Long-grain rice (1 kg)
- ☐ Red lentils (250 g)
- ☐ Chopped tomatoes (4 tins)
- ☐ Kidney + black beans (3 tins)
- ☐ Tomato purée, stock cubes
- ☐ Small tortillas (16)
- ☐ Panko or dried breadcrumbs

FROZEN, BAKERY + FLAVOUR

- ☐ Peas, sweetcorn, mixed veg
- ☐ Wholemeal bread (1 loaf)
- ☐ Mild chili powder, cumin
- ☐ Smoked paprika, dried oregano
- ☐ Reduced-salt soy sauce
- ☐ Oil, mayonnaise, flour

Quantities are approximate and depend on appetites. Check the cupboard first; many staples last for weeks. Prices are not listed because they vary by shop, country and season.

A cupboard that saves weeknights.

Keep a few long-lasting staples and a family meal is always within reach.



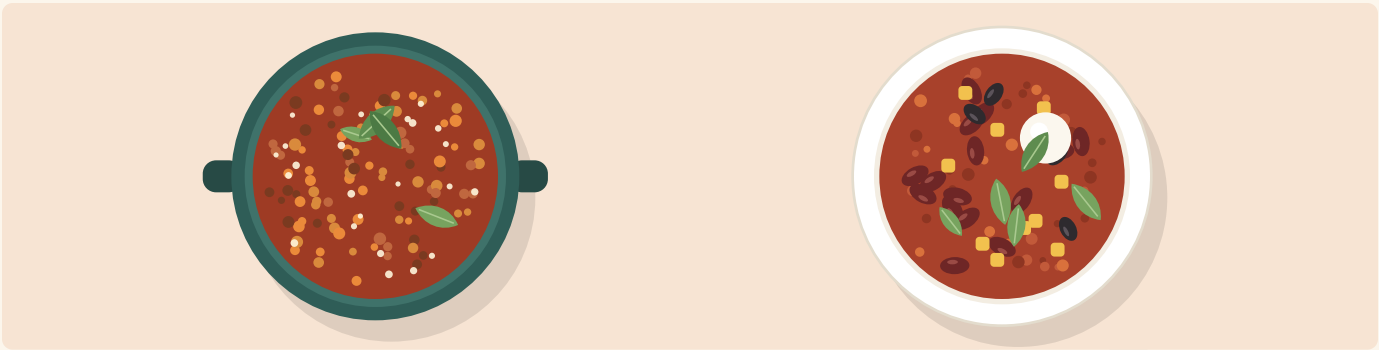
In the cupboard	In the freezer	In the fridge
Pasta, rice, oats, noodles	Peas, sweetcorn, mixed veg	Eggs, milk, yogurt
Tinned tomatoes, beans, lentils	Fish fillets or fish fingers	Cheddar, butter or spread
Tortillas, crackers, stock cubes	Wholemeal bread, pitta	Carrots, cucumber, apples
Spices, soy sauce, oil	Portions of chili and sauce	Labelled, dated leftovers

Five backup dinners for chaos nights

- **Cheesy bean quesadillas.** Tortillas, mashed tinned beans and cheese, toasted in a dry pan.
- **Egg fried rice.** Chilled leftover rice, frozen veg and eggs (page 19).
- **Pasta with peas.** Cook frozen peas in the pasta water; add pesto or a tin of tomatoes.
- **Beans on toast with cheese.** With apple slices or carrot sticks on the side.
- **Freezer night.** A portion of chili or bolognese, reheated until steaming hot, with rice or pasta.

A one-hour batch-cook Sunday.

Two pots and one chopping session: three weeknights mostly done.



Time	Do this	Why
0:00	Chop the onions, carrots, celery and garlic for both pots at once.	One chopping session, two meals
0:10	Start the lentil bolognese (page 20) and leave it to simmer.	It looks after itself for 30 minutes
0:20	Start the mild veggie chili (page 17) in a second pot.	Beans and vegetables, no browning
0:30	Slice peppers and onions for Tuesday’s fajitas; keep them in a tub.	Saves ten minutes on a busy night
0:40	Grate cheese, wash fruit and fill the lunchbox drawer.	Faster packed lunches all week
0:50	Portion, cool and label: fridge for this week, freezer for later.	Name and date on every tub

COOL IT QUICKLY, STORE IT SAFELY

Divide big batches into shallow containers so they cool quickly, and refrigerate within 2 hours of cooking. Eat refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days, or freeze them. [3][6] Cooked rice needs extra care: see page 19. [14]

Freezer meals that earn their space.

Cook on a calm night, eat on a busy one. A few rules make it work.

Freezes well	Freeze with care	Does not freeze well
Chili, bolognese, soups and stews	Cooked pasta: slightly undercook it and freeze it in sauce	Lettuce and salad leaves [7]
Cooked chicken or meat in a sauce	Frittata slices, wrapped well	Mayonnaise and cream sauces [7]
Bread, tortillas and pitta	Grated cheese, spread out in a bag	Hard-boiled eggs [5]

01 Cool, then freeze

Cool food quickly in shallow containers, then freeze it in family-sized or single portions. Leave a little space at the top of tubs of sauce.

02 Label everything

Name, date and number of portions. Log it on Worksheet 4 so food is eaten while it is at its best.

03 Thaw safely

Thaw in the fridge overnight, in cold water in a leak-proof bag, or in the microwave. Food thawed in the fridge should be used within 3-4 days. [6]

04 Reheat until steaming hot

Reheat leftovers to 74°C / 165°F, until steaming hot all the way through. [4]

FROZEN IS SAFE; TIME IS ABOUT QUALITY

Food kept frozen at -18°C / 0°F stays safe indefinitely. Recommended freezer times are for best quality, because flavour and texture fade the longer food is stored. [7]

Food safety for family kitchens.

Four habits and a food thermometer keep weeknight cooking safe for everyone at the table.

CLEAN

Wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, and wash boards, utensils and worktops.

SEPARATE

Use separate chopping boards for raw meat, poultry and fish and for food that will not be cooked.

COOK

Cook to the temperatures below. A food thermometer takes the guesswork out.

CHILL

Keep the fridge at 4°C / 40°F or below and refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours.

From FoodSafety.gov’s four steps to food safety. [3]

Food	Cook to at least
Chicken and turkey, all cuts including mince	74°C / 165°F
Beef, pork or lamb mince; sausages	71°C / 160°F
Fish fillets and fish fingers made from fillets	63°C / 145°F, or until it flakes easily
Egg dishes such as frittata	71°C / 160°F
Leftovers and casseroles, reheated	74°C / 165°F

Safe minimum internal temperatures from FoodSafety.gov. [4]

Cooked food	Fridge	Freezer (best quality)
Soups and stews, including chili and bolognese	3-4 days	2-3 months
Cooked meat or poultry	3-4 days	2-6 months
Pizza	3-4 days	1-2 months

Storage times from the FoodSafety.gov cold food storage chart. [5] Cooked rice is different: eat it within 24 hours (page 19). [14]

Before you cook: bring the kids in.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests involving children in choosing and preparing food. [13]
Here is where to start.

Age (roughly)	Jobs to try, with an adult nearby
2-3 years	Wash vegetables, tear lettuce and herbs, stir cold mixtures, put rubbish in the bin
4-6 years	Crack eggs into a bowl, measure with cups and spoons, mash, sprinkle cheese, set the table
7-9 years	Grate cheese, peel vegetables, whisk, read the recipe aloud, mix a simple dressing
10-12 years	Chop with a proper knife once shown how; use the hob with an adult beside them
Teenagers	Plan and cook one family dinner a week from this planner

Hands and boards. Everyone washes their hands before cooking and after touching raw meat or eggs. Raw meat has its own board. [3]

Allergies. Check labels for allergens such as milk, egg, gluten, fish, soy, sesame, peanuts and tree nuts, and use the swap notes.

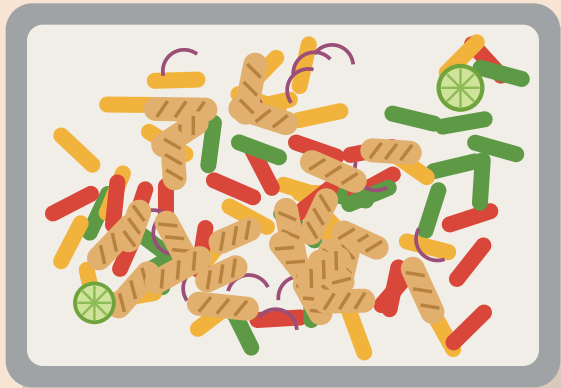
Salt and spice. The recipes are mild and use little added salt. Add chilli and extra seasoning at the table.

Portions. Each recipe feeds two adults and two children. Serve children small portions; they can always ask for more. [11]



Sheet-pan chicken fajitas

One tray, ten minutes of hands-on time and a build-your-own dinner.



SERVES 4

PREP + COOK 10 min + 25 min

Ingredients

- 500 g chicken breast or thigh fillets, in strips
- 3 peppers, mixed colours, sliced
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 2 tbsp oil
- Mild spice mix: 2 tsp smoked paprika, 1 tsp ground cumin, 1 tsp garlic powder, ½ tsp dried oregano
- 8 small tortillas, warmed
- To serve: grated cheese, plain yogurt, lettuce, lime wedges

Method

1. Heat the oven to 220°C / 200°C fan / 425°F and line a large baking tray.
2. Toss the chicken, peppers and onion with the oil and spice mix, then spread out in a single layer. Use two trays if it is crowded.
3. Roast for 20-25 minutes, stirring once, until the vegetables are soft and charred at the edges and the chicken reaches 74°C / 165°F.
4. Put the tray, the warm tortillas and the toppings on the table and let everyone build their own.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Vegetarian: swap the chicken for 2 tins of drained black beans, added for the last 10 minutes. Spice lovers can add chilli flakes at the table. Use corn tortillas if you need gluten-free. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours and eat within 3-4 days; leftover chicken makes good lunchbox wraps.

KID JOB

Wash and tear the lettuce, and set out the toppings in small bowls. See page 14 for jobs by age.

One-pot tomato and veg pasta

Pasta, sauce and vegetables cooked together in one pan.



SERVES 4

PREP + COOK 5 min + 20 min

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped; 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 tin (400 g) chopped tomatoes
- 750 ml (3 cups) low-salt vegetable stock
- 350 g short pasta, such as penne or fusilli
- 150 g (1 cup) frozen peas
- 50 g grated cheddar or parmesan, to serve

Method

1. Heat the oil in a large, deep pan. Cook the onion and carrot gently for 5 minutes, then add the garlic for 1 minute.
2. Add the tomatoes, stock and pasta. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 12-14 minutes, stirring often, until the pasta is tender and most of the liquid is absorbed. Add a splash of water if it looks dry.
3. Stir in the peas for the last 3 minutes.
4. Serve with cheese at the table.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Add a tin of drained tuna, leftover chicken or a tin of white beans with the peas. Use gluten-free pasta (check the cooking time) or dairy-free cheese as needed. Refrigerate for up to 3-4 days; reheat with a splash of water until steaming hot.

KID JOB

Measure the frozen peas; older children can grate the carrot and the cheese. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Mild veggie chili

A big, gentle pot of beans and vegetables that freezes beautifully.



SERVES 4, plus 4 to freeze

PREP + COOK 15 min + 35 min

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp oil; 2 onions, 2 carrots and 2 peppers, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tsp mild chili powder, 2 tsp cumin, 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 tins (400 g) chopped tomatoes + 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 tins kidney beans + 1 tin black beans, drained
- 200 g (1½ cups) frozen sweetcorn
- 200 ml water or low-salt stock
- To serve: rice, yogurt, grated cheese

Method

1. Heat the oil in a large pot and cook the onions, carrots and peppers gently for 10 minutes until soft.
2. Add the garlic and spices and stir for 1 minute.
3. Add the tomatoes, purée, beans, sweetcorn and water. Simmer for 25-30 minutes, stirring now and then, until thick.
4. Serve with rice and let everyone add their own toppings. Adults can add hot sauce at the table.

SWAPS + KEEPING

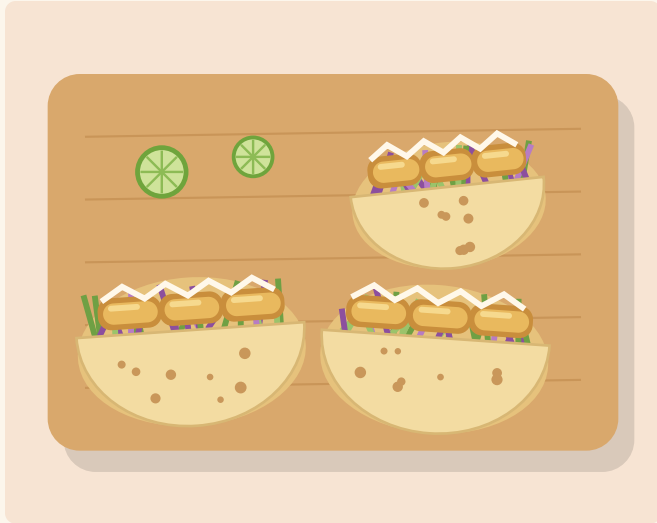
Swap one tin of beans for 250 g lean beef mince, browned at step 1 and cooked to 71°C / 160°F. Serve on baked potatoes or with tortilla chips for a change. Cool quickly and refrigerate for 3-4 days, or freeze in portions for 2-3 months for best quality.

KID JOB

Rinse the tinned beans in a sieve and stir in the sweetcorn. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Fish-finger tacos

Crunchy oven-baked fish, crunchy slaw and soft tortillas.



SERVES 4

PREP + COOK 15 min + 15 min

Ingredients

- 400 g skinless white fish fillets (cod, pollock or haddock), cut into fingers
- 3 tbsp plain flour; 1 egg, beaten
- 75 g (1 cup) panko or dried breadcrumbs + ½ tsp paprika
- 2 tbsp oil
- Slaw: ¼ small red cabbage and 1 carrot, shredded, with the juice of 1 lime
- Sauce: 4 tbsp yogurt + 1 tbsp mayonnaise
- 8 small tortillas

Method

1. Heat the oven to 220°C / 200°C fan / 425°F and oil a baking tray.
2. Coat the fish in flour, then egg, then the breadcrumbs mixed with paprika. Lay on the tray and drizzle with the oil.
3. Bake for 12-15 minutes, turning once, until golden and the fish reaches 63°C / 145°F and flakes easily.
4. Mix the slaw and the sauce. Put everything in the middle of the table to build tacos.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Short on time: use shop-bought fish fingers, cooked as the pack says. Gluten-free: use gluten-free breadcrumbs and corn tortillas. Check children's portions for bones. Best eaten fresh. Freeze uncooked, breaded fingers on a tray, then bag them; bake from frozen for a few extra minutes until they reach 63°C / 145°F.

KID JOB

Dip the fish in flour, egg and crumbs, then wash hands well with soap. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Veggie egg fried rice

The best use of yesterday's rice, on the table in fifteen minutes.



SERVES 4

PREP + COOK 5 min + 10 min

Ingredients

- 600 g (4 cups) cooked rice, cooled within 1 hour and chilled (see note)
- 2 tbsp neutral oil
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 300 g (2 cups) frozen peas, sweetcorn and carrots
- 4 spring onions, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, grated (optional)
- 2-3 tbsp reduced-salt soy sauce, 1 tsp sesame oil

Method

1. Heat 1 tbsp oil in a large frying pan or wok. Pour in the eggs, scramble until just set, then tip onto a plate.
2. Add the remaining oil, the frozen vegetables and spring onions, and stir-fry for 3-4 minutes.
3. Add the rice and garlic. Stir-fry for 4-5 minutes, breaking up any clumps, until steaming hot throughout.
4. Return the egg, add the soy sauce and sesame oil and toss. Add leftover chicken or tofu if you have it.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Use tamari for gluten-free. Egg-free: add cubed firm tofu instead. Adults can add chilli sauce at the table. Rice note: the NHS advises refrigerating cooked rice within 1 hour, eating it within 24 hours and reheating it only once, until steaming hot. [14]

KID JOB

Crack and beat the eggs, and measure out the frozen vegetables. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Lentil bolognese

A rich, budget-stretching sauce for spaghetti, lasagne or baked potatoes.



SERVES 4, plus 4 to freeze

PREP + COOK 15 min + 35 min

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions, 2 carrots and 2 celery sticks, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 250 g (1¼ cups) red lentils, rinsed
- 2 tins (400 g) chopped tomatoes + 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 750 ml low-salt vegetable stock
- 2 tsp dried oregano or mixed herbs
- Spaghetti and grated cheese, to serve

Method

1. Heat the oil and cook the onion, carrot and celery gently for 10 minutes until soft. Add the garlic for 1 minute.
2. Stir in the lentils, tomatoes, purée, stock and herbs. Simmer for 25-30 minutes, stirring often, until the lentils are soft and the sauce is thick. Add water if it catches.
3. Cook the spaghetti as the packet says. Blend the sauce briefly if your children prefer it smooth.
4. Serve with cheese at the table.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Half and half: brown 250 g beef mince before the vegetables, cook it to 71°C / 160°F and use half the lentils. Vegan without the cheese. Refrigerate for 3-4 days, or freeze in portions for 2-3 months for best quality.

KID JOB

Rinse the lentils in a sieve and help stir the sauce, with an adult at the hob. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Veggie frittata with toast

Eggs, vegetables and toast: the fastest crowd-pleaser in the book.



SERVES 4

PREP + COOK 10 min + 20 min

Ingredients

- 8 large eggs
- 60 ml (¼ cup) milk
- 1 tbsp oil or butter
- 1 small onion or 4 spring onions, sliced
- 1 pepper, diced; 2 handfuls of spinach
- 100 g cherry tomatoes, halved
- 50 g grated cheddar
- Wholemeal toast and fruit, to serve

Method

1. Heat the grill. Heat the oil in a 25 cm ovenproof frying pan and soften the onion and pepper for 5 minutes, then wilt in the spinach.
2. Whisk the eggs and milk, pour into the pan and scatter over the tomatoes and cheese.
3. Cook gently for 6-8 minutes until the edges set, then grill for 3-5 minutes until set in the centre (71°C / 160°F).
4. Cut into wedges and serve with toast soldiers and fruit.

SWAPS + KEEPING

Dairy-free: leave out the milk and cheese. Any leftover vegetables work: cooked potatoes, broccoli or peas. Refrigerate within 2 hours and eat within 3-4 days. A cold slice suits a lunchbox packed with two cold sources (page 24).

KID JOB

Whisk the eggs and milk, tear the spinach and butter the toast. See page 14 for jobs by age.

Picky eating: what actually helps.

Refusing new foods is common in young children and usually eases with time. [11][13]

01 Share the jobs at the table

In Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility, parents decide what food is served, when and where; children decide whether to eat and how much of what is offered. Trusting that split takes pressure off everyone. [10]

02 Offer, offer again, then offer again

Liking grows with repeated tastes. The AAP notes it can take 10 or more tastes before a toddler accepts a new food [13]. In one randomised trial, children offered a small daily taste of a disliked vegetable for 14 days came to like it more. [12]

03 Eat together

Children learn by copying you. Eat with them as often as you can and serve the same family meal, adapted if needed. [11]

04 Take the pressure off

Do not force, bribe or use food as a reward. If food is refused, take it away without comment and try again another day. [11][13]

05 Plan snacks too

Scheduled meals and planned snacks help children come to the table hungry [13]. For young children, the NHS suggests two healthy snacks a day is plenty. [11]

WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

Speak to your GP, health visitor or paediatrician if your child eats a very limited range of foods, is losing weight or not growing as expected, often gags or chokes, or if mealtimes cause real distress. This guide cannot assess an individual child.

A calmer dinner, step by step.

Small changes to how food is served often matter more than what is on the plate.



One familiar food, one new food

Serve at least one food your child usually eats alongside anything new, and offer new foods in very small amounts. [13]

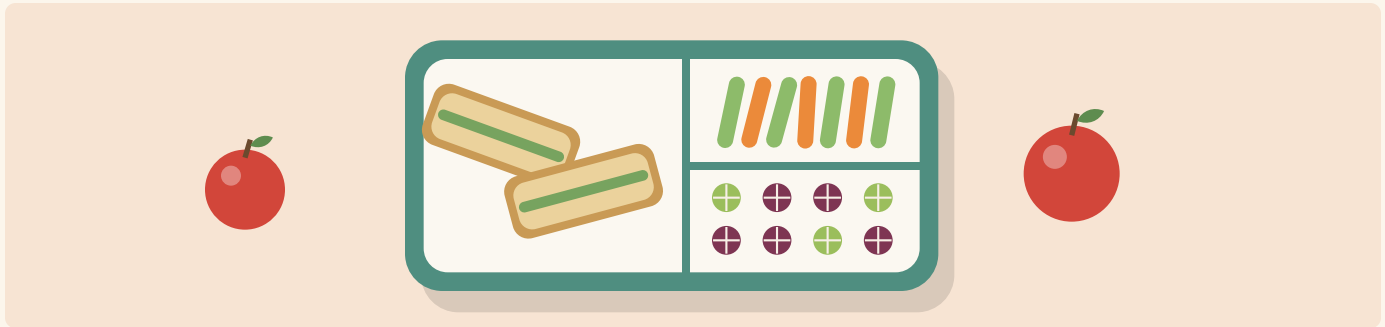
Instead of...	Try...
"Three more bites, then you can get down."	"You don't have to eat it. It's there if you want some." [10]
A separate meal cooked just for the children	One family meal with at least one food each child usually eats [13]
Big portions on the plate	Small portions; seconds are always available [11]
Sweets as a reward for eating vegetables	Rewards that are not food: a trip to the park or a game [11]
Screens on and a rush	Screens off; chat about the day and keep mealtimes enjoyable [11][13]

Build food bridges

Once a food is accepted, move to similar ones in colour, flavour or texture: from carrot sticks to cucumber sticks, or from plain pasta to pasta with a little sauce on the side. Pair new flavours with familiar ones, such as broccoli with a sprinkle of cheese. [13]

The five-part lunchbox builder.

Pick one from each column and a packed lunch takes five minutes.



Main	Fruit + veg	Protein + dairy	Something extra	Drink
Wholemeal wrap with leftover chicken	Carrot and cucumber sticks	Cheese cubes	Crackers or rice cakes	Water
Pasta salad from dinner	Quartered grapes	Hard-boiled egg	Plain popcorn (age 5+)	Milk
Frittata slice (page 21)	Apple slices	Plain yogurt pot	Homemade muffin	Water
Hummus with pitta	Pepper strips	Bean salad	Fruit loaf slice	Water
Flask of chili or bolognese	Satsuma segments	Grated cheese on top	Oatcakes	Milk

Keep it cold. Pack perishable food with at least two cold sources, such as two frozen gel packs, or a gel pack and a frozen bottle of water, in an insulated bag. [8]

Keep it hot. Warm a vacuum flask with boiling water, empty it, add food reheated until steaming hot and keep it closed until lunch. [8]

For younger children. Cut grapes, cherry tomatoes and berries into quarters and vegetables into narrow batons. No whole nuts or popcorn for children under 5. [9]

Check the rules. Many schools and nurseries are nut-free; check your setting's policy.

Weekly dinner plan

Plan the busy nights first. Leave one night for leftovers or a backup meal.

Day	Dinner	Who cooks + helps	Prep ahead	Leftovers for
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

BACKUP MEAL THIS WEEK

TIP Write the dinner that makes leftovers first, then plan the nights that use them.

Shopping list by aisle

Check the cupboard, fridge and freezer first. Tick items as you shop.

FRUIT + VEG

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

MEAT, FISH + EGGS

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

DAIRY + ALTERNATIVES

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

BREAD, PASTA, RICE + CUPBOARD

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

FROZEN

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

LUNCHBOX + HOUSEHOLD

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Already have it? Cross it off before you leave. Frozen and tinned vegetables keep for longer and work well in cooked dinners.

Four-week recipe rotation

Write in the family favourites for each theme night, then repeat the grid every month.

Night	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Mon Pasta				
Tue Wraps + tacos				
Wed Pot night				
Thu Rice + noodles				
Fri Fish or fakeaway				
Sat Breakfast for dinner				
Sun Batch cook				

ONE NEW RECIPE TO TRY THIS MONTH

TIP When a new dinner is a hit, add it to Worksheet 6 and give it a slot here.

Freezer + leftovers log

Log it when it goes in; cross it off when it comes out.

Food	Portions	Date frozen	Best by	Used

IN THE FRIDGE NOW: LEFTOVERS TO EAT WITHIN 3-4 DAYS

SAFETY Label with the name and date. Thaw in the fridge, in cold water or in the microwave, and reheat leftovers to 74°C / 165°F until steaming hot. [4][6]

Lunchbox planner

Plan five lunches at once, using the builder on page 24.

LUNCHES FOR _____ WEEK OF _____

Day	Main	Fruit + veg	Protein + dairy	Extra + drink
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				

LUNCHBOX SHOPPING FOR NEXT WEEK

COLD PACKS FROZEN? FLASK CLEAN? BOTTLES FILLED?

TIP Pack from dinner leftovers where you can, and keep perishable food cold with two cold sources. [8]

Family favourites log

The dinners that worked, and the foods you are still offering.

Recipe	Who loved it	Tweak next time	Page / link

New food we are trying	Tastes offered: tick a box each time
	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

It can take 10 or more tastes before a new food is accepted, so every box counts. [13]

The useful fine print

The sources behind specific statements in this sample, and what this edition is.

1 / USDA MyPlate [Open the source](#)

US Department of Agriculture, What is MyPlate. Supports the plate guidance on page 5: make half your plate fruits and vegetables; make half your grains whole grains.

2 / NHS: The Eatwell Guide [Open the source](#)

NHS. Fruit and vegetables and starchy foods should each make up just over a third of what we eat; balance can be achieved over a day or a week; the guide does not apply to children under 2, and after age 2 children move to family foods in the Eatwell proportions. Supports page 5.

3 / FoodSafety.gov: 4 steps to food safety [Open the source](#)

US government. Clean (wash hands for at least 20 seconds), separate (separate boards for raw meat, poultry and seafood), cook, chill (fridge at 40°F / 4°C or below; refrigerate perishables within 2 hours). Supports pages 11, 13 and 14.

4 / FoodSafety.gov: safe minimum internal temperatures [Open the source](#)

US government. Poultry 165°F (74°C); ground meat and sausage 160°F (71°C); fish 145°F (63°C) or until it flakes easily; egg dishes 160°F (71°C); leftovers and casseroles 165°F (74°C). Supports the recipes on pages 15-21 and pages 10, 12, 13 and 28.

5 / FoodSafety.gov: cold food storage chart [Open the source](#)

US government. Soups and stews 3-4 days in the fridge, 2-3 months frozen; cooked meat or poultry 3-4 days / 2-6 months; pizza 3-4 days / 1-2 months; hard-cooked eggs do not freeze. Supports pages 12 and 13.

6 / USDA FSIS: Leftovers and food safety [Open the source](#)

US Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours (1 hour above 90°F / 32°C); keep 3-4 days in the fridge; thaw in the fridge, cold water or microwave; use fridge-thawed food within 3-4 days; reheat to 165°F. Supports pages 11, 12 and 28.

7 / USDA FSIS: Freezing and food safety [Open the source](#)

Food stored constantly at 0°F (-18°C) is always safe; freezer storage times are for quality only; mayonnaise, cream sauce and lettuce do not freeze well. Supports page 12.

8 / USDA FSIS: Keeping bag lunches safe [Open the source](#)

Pack perishable lunches with at least two cold sources, such as two frozen gel packs or a gel pack plus a frozen drink, in an insulated bag; pre-heat a vacuum flask with boiling water for hot food. Supports pages 24 and 29.

9 / NHS Best Start in Life: preparing food safely [Open the source](#)

NHS. Cut small round fruits such as grapes, cherries, berries and cherry tomatoes into quarters; cut vegetables into narrow batons; do not give whole nuts or popcorn to children under 5. Supports page 24.

10 / Ellyn Satter Institute: Division of Responsibility [Open the source](#)

Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding: adults decide what, when and where food is offered; children decide how much and whether to eat. Supports pages 6, 22 and 23.

11 / NHS: Fussy eaters [Open the source](#)

NHS. It is normal for toddlers to refuse new foods; eat together; give small portions and praise; do not force; do not use food as a reward; 2 healthy snacks a day is plenty; make mealtimes enjoyable. Supports pages 14, 22 and 23.

12 / Repeated exposure trial (Wardle et al., 2003) [Open the source](#)

Wardle J, Cooke LJ, Gibson EL et al. Increasing children's acceptance of vegetables; a randomized trial of parent-led exposure. *Appetite* 2003;40(2):155-62. Daily tastes of a disliked vegetable for 14 days increased liking. Supports page 22.

13 / American Academy of Pediatrics: picky eaters [Open the source](#)

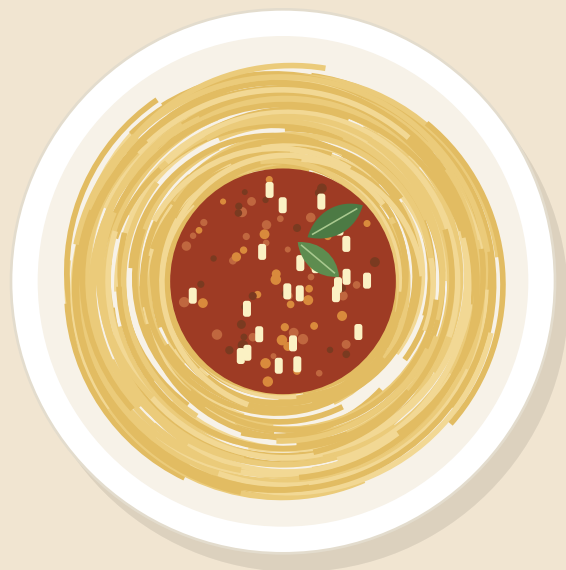
HealthyChildren.org (AAP). It can take 10 or more tastes before a toddler accepts a food; include a familiar food; no bribes; involve children in choosing and cooking; food bridges and familiar pairings. Supports pages 14, 22, 23 and 30.

14 / NHS: Starchy foods and carbohydrates (rice safety) [Open the source](#)

NHS. Refrigerate cooked rice within 1 hour and eat it within 24 hours; reheat until steaming hot; do not reheat rice more than once. Supports pages 8, 11, 13 and 19.

About this edition. Written, illustrated and designed by Forgewick, operated by Haris Sohail. Studio Edition 1.0, September 2026. All recipes, illustrations and worksheets are original. General family food-planning information; not medical or dietetic advice; not reviewed by a registered dietitian; no nutrient analysis.

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THE FAMILY WEEKNIGHT MEAL PLANNER

Less “what’s for dinner?” More dinners together.

Plan five dinners, shop once, cook a few things ahead
and keep the meals your family loves on repeat.

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