

# The Busy Woman's Guide to Quick and Healthy Meals: 24 Easy Breakfasts, Lunches and Dinners + 22 Tips for Cooking Healthy Food Quickly and Easily

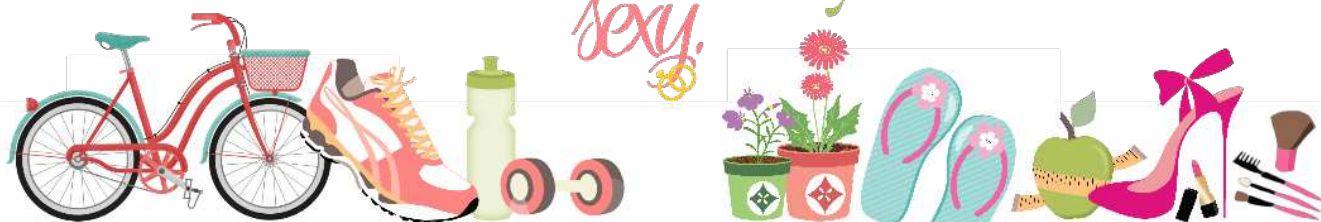
Eat well, even when you're pressed for time.

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When you first decided to eat a healthier diet and feed your family more real food, you may have expected to run into some obstacles along the way. But you probably didn't realize how hard it is to stick with healthy eating when things get crazy, or how quickly a busy week can knock you off track. At least I didn't. I had no idea that good intentions could morph into a fast food meal eaten out of paper bags quicker than the kids could say "hamburgers and fries!" That's because I didn't have a strategy for super-busy days, the kind of days that have you racing to fix breakfast before the school bus arrives (in 10 minutes!) or stumbling in the door at 6:00 pm with absolutely no answer to the question, "What's for dinner?"

On those days, a few simple things will help me stay on track and feed my family a healthy meal quickly and easily - a list of quick and easy real food breakfasts, lunches and dinners; some real food staples in the pantry and refrigerator; and a few tips and tricks that make real food prep quicker and easier. And if you're a busy wife and mom who's trying to serve her family more real food and less processed food, you need those three things too. So here are some things that can help – **24 meals that stick to the basics and focus on simplicity** and **22 tips for prepping real food quickly and easily**. No new recipes, no fancy ingredients, no complicated food prep - just simple, quick-to-fix meals and strategies. I hope you'll enjoy them, and that they'll make your life just a little bit easier.

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## Breakfast

- **Whole wheat toast, natural peanut butter, and milk** – This simple meal contains a good mix of complex carbohydrates, protein and fat. And most kids and adults are happy to eat it.
- **Yogurt and fruit** – You can make something like my [Yogurt, Fruit and Nut Bowl](#), or just toss some plain Greek 1% or 2% yogurt, a bit of natural sweetener, and some cut-up fruit or berries (frozen is fine) into a bowl. I eat this for breakfast almost every morning, and it always holds me until lunch.
- **Oatmeal in the Crockpot** – Whip up a batch of oatmeal before you go to bed, and enjoy a hearty and delicious breakfast in the morning. My friend Christina at Juggling



Real Food and Real Life has a great recipe for [Apple Cinnamon Oats](#) in the Crockpot. (She also has a recipe for [Blueberry Baked Oatmeal](#) that you can make ahead and reheat.)

- **Boiled eggs, buttered whole wheat toast and orange slices.** Boil eggs and slice oranges a day or two ahead of time and have them ready for busy mornings. That way you'll

only need to pop some whole wheat bread in the toaster and butter it.

- **Banana, natural peanut butter, and milk.** Slice a banana for each person and put a dab of natural peanut butter on each slice.
- **Homemade energy bars and milk.** On the weekend, when you have a little more time, make a batch or two of [Homemade Energy Bars](#). On *really* busy mornings, kids (and moms!) can eat an energy bar and drink some milk on the way to school.
- **Homemade granola and milk** – Make a big batch of [homemade granola](#) on the weekend, adding some dried fruit and nuts for natural energy and healthy fat. Serve in a bowl with milk.

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## Lunch

- **Leftovers** – This is my all-time favorite lunch. I always try to make enough dinner to have leftovers for a day or two for lunch.
- **Real food PB&J** – Use whole wheat bread, natural peanut butter, and jam or fruit spread without corn syrup, and suddenly the good old PB&J becomes a healthy lunch. And most kids and adults love it! Add an apple or some carrot sticks to round it out.
- **Salad** – Wash and cut up vegetables on the weekend, then make and package 2 or 3 salads. Add some grilled chicken, garbanzo beans, boiled egg or other source of protein to make them a complete and healthy lunch. Package them without dressing until you're ready to eat them. Then add a simple [homemade dressing with olive oil](#).
- **Grilled cheese** – A grilled cheese sandwich made with whole wheat bread, real cheese and a little bit of butter or olive oil in the pan is an easy real food lunch. Add some orange or apple slices and everyone is happy!
- **Mini Pizzas**. Preheat the oven to 400. Line a large baking sheet with foil (for easier clean-up) and place whole wheat flatbreads on the foil. (Keep some of these in the freezer for busy days.) Top with spaghetti sauce (or tomato sauce and dried Italian seasoning), grated cheese, and veggies or other toppings your family likes. Bake for about 12 minutes. Serve with simple salads, cut up vegetables, or sliced fruit. (These are great for dinner too!)



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## Dinner

- **Chicken, beef or pork in the Crockpot** – Put enough boneless skinless chicken breasts, London broil roast, or pork tenderloin to feed your family two meals into your Crockpot. Add a little bit of water, broth or sauce of your choice. Cook all day and serve it sliced that evening with simple sides, like brown rice with butter and steamed green beans.
- **Next-day tacos** – The next day, shred the rest of the chicken, beef or pork, mix with salsa and make tacos. Serve with as many or as few toppings as you like – just shredded cheese and more salsa is fine if you're really short on time. Add some fruit on the side.
- **Mediterranean Chicken Wraps** – For this simple meal, grill or pan sauté boneless, skinless chicken breasts. When done, let them cool a bit, then slice thinly. Warm pita breads or flatbreads in the oven, microwave or skillet. Set out hummus, feta or other cheese, [salad dressing or vinaigrette](#), and as many vegetables as you have time to fix (lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, etc.). Let each person make his or her own wrap. Serve with orange slices or other fruit.
- **Sauteed Chicken Breasts, Baked Sweet Potatoes and Quick Brown Rice** - Heat olive oil or salad dressing/marinade in a large skillet. Add enough boneless, skinless chicken breasts to serve your family. Brown on both sides, then cover and cook until done. While the chicken is cooking, put a pot of water on to boil, following the instructions for the amount of quick/instant brown rice you'll need. Pierce sweet potatoes several times and place in microwave. Cook on high for 10 minutes or until soft all the way through. When water is boiling, add rice and cook as directed (usually about 10 minutes). When sweet potatoes are done, cut them open or in half and add butter. (Cinnamon is a nice addition too.) Add butter, salt and pepper to taste to the rice.
- **Soup and Grilled Cheese.** If you have some homemade soup in the freezer, great. If not, keep several cans or boxes of good-quality soups on hand, the kinds that include primarily real food ingredients. Organic is great; even though it's expensive, it's not as expensive as going out to dinner on a busy evening! While the soup is heating, make sandwiches with whole wheat bread and real cheese and toast them in a pan with some olive oil or butter. Serve with carrot sticks, grapes, or apple slices.
- **Scrambled Eggs, Whole Wheat Toast and Fruit.** Breakfast for dinner can be quick



and healthy. Cut up whatever fruit you have on hand - even apples and bananas are fine - and make a simple fruit salad, crack enough eggs to serve your family and mix with a bit of milk, salt and pepper. Whisk together (a stick blender does this really quickly). Melt butter in a large skillet and scramble eggs. While eggs are cooking, begin making toast. Butter it as it comes out of the toaster and put it in the oven to keep warm. Serve eggs, toast with jam or fruit spread and fruit salad. (My friend Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life has [great tips for enjoying real food breakfasts for dinner.](#))

- **Whole Wheat Pasta with Cheese and Pick-up Vegetables.** Put a pot of water on to boil. While it's heating, grate your family's favorite cheese. (We like extra sharp cheddar on pasta.) Then start pulling together a plate of pick-up vegetables - baby carrots or carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, slices of cucumber, strips of red or orange pepper, whatever you have on hand. When the water boils, add enough whole wheat pasta to serve your family and cook according to the package directions.

Drain the pasta and add butter or olive oil to coat lightly and salt to taste. Divide among plates and top with grated cheese. Place the vegetable plate on the table and allow family members to choose from it.

- **Spaghetti.** Keep several jars of high-quality spaghetti sauce on hand - look for brands that contain primarily tomatoes and just a few other ingredients - and little or no sugar.

(Some spaghetti sauces list sugar as the second or third ingredient!) Or make a big batch of your own one weekend and freeze dinner-size portions that you can grab on hectic days. While whole grain spaghetti is cooking, make a simple salad or cut up vegetables for a simple veggie plate with some salad dressing on the side as a dip.

- **Chicken Fajitas with Fruit.** Heat olive oil in a large skillet. Add enough boneless, skinless chicken breasts for your family and cook until done. Remove from pan to a cutting board to cool slightly. While chicken is cooking, slice onions and red/orange/yellow peppers. Add more olive oil to the pan and saute vegetables. Grate cheese (or, even better, take previously-grated cheese out of the refrigerator or freezer). Slice apples, oranges or other fruit. When chicken is cool



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enough to handle, cut into strips. Place sliced chicken and cooked peppers and onions on a large platter and cheese in a bowl. Warm whole wheat tortillas in the microwave. Open a jar of salsa. Place all the ingredients on the table and let each person make his or her own fajitas. Serve with fruit.

- **Chili in the Crockpot** – Nicky at Little Family Adventure has a great recipe for [Sweet Potato and Black Bean Chili](#) that you put together in the morning and cook all day in your Crockpot. This is a vegetarian recipe that allows you to serve a delicious meatless meal while still keeping your meat eaters happy. You can use canned black beans (rinse them) and canned chopped tomatoes in this recipe to save even more time. (By the way, Nicky has a lot of [weekly meal plans](#) that are perfect for busy families.)
- **Homemade Sloppy Joes** – Almost everyone loves Sloppy Joes, but the versions you make with a packet or can sometimes include ingredients you don't want to eat. So Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life has created perfect [Homemade Sloppy Joes in the Crockpot](#). You can put together the meat mixture in the morning and let it cook all day, or make it on the weekend to reheat on busy weekdays.



- **Black Beans and Quick Brown Rice with**

- **Sliced Fruit.** Heat olive oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven. Coarsely chop an onion and saute it in the olive oil. While the onion cooks, open cans of black beans (enough for your family) plus one or two cans of diced tomatoes. Rinse and drain the beans. In the meantime, start water for brown rice heating in another pot, according to the package directions. Add beans and tomatoes to

cooked onions, and season according to your family's tastes (salt, pepper, Italian seasoning, cumin, chili powder, Tabasco, etc.). Cook for 10 minutes. Add rice to boiling water and cook as directed (usually about 10 minutes). While the beans and rice cook, slice oranges, apples or whatever fruit you have on hand. Serve beans on top of rice, with fruit on the side.

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# 22 Tips for Cooking Real Food Quickly and Easily

OK, let's just get this out in the open – **preparing and serving healthy food takes time and energy**, more time and energy than preparing and serving processed or ready-made food. It just does. So even though you might like to clean up your family's diet – [ditching some of the processed stuff](#) and [replacing it with real foods](#) - you're not sure it's possible. The dilemma, of course, is how to make it happen - your days are already packed with commitments, *so where in the world would you find the time?*

The answer is to **break down healthy food preparation into small, manageable chunks of time**. You probably can't take an hour each day to prep real food, but you probably can devote 15 minutes to it. And over time, those 15-minute efforts can make a significant difference in the quality of your family's meals and snacks. Want to give it a try? Here are **22 ways to prep healthy food in 15 minutes or less**:

1. **Make a meal/snack plan for the week.** This is my #1 tip for eating well and feeding your family well. If you don't have a plan, fast food, takeout meals and unhealthy snacks are more likely to creep into your family's diet. Use your calendar and create a plan that works with your schedule. The 24 healthy meals included in this ebook can help you get started.
2. **Clean out and organize your refrigerator or pantry.** Just 15 minutes of organizing, getting rid of old stuff and putting "like things" together, saves you time and money and lets you know what you already have on hand.
3. **Bake several large chicken breasts.** Pop them in the oven and do other things while they cook.
4. **Shred baked chicken breasts.** Shredded chicken is great to have on hand for making chicken tacos, chicken salad or barbecue chicken sandwiches. Or use it to turn a large salad into a meal.
5. **Wash fruits and vegetables your family will eat over the next several days.** I use a bowl of white vinegar in water for this job.
6. **Prep fruits and vegetables you'll use in the next 2 or 3 days.** For example, cut carrot sticks and orange slices for snacks, cut up bunches of grapes into little "trees," chop onions to use in recipes.





7. **Prep vegetables that can be used twice during the week.** For example, chop onions and peppers once, then divide them to use in spaghetti sauce and chili, or omelets and tacos.
8. **Package the snacks your family will need for the next few days.** Make individual bags or small containers of granola, nuts, trail mix, cheese cubes, crackers, baby carrots, grapes or other healthy snacks. Keep them together in the refrigerator or in a drawer or bin, so family members can grab them easily.
9. **Mix two jars of natural peanut butter.** If you love natural peanut butter, but hate that it's hard (and messy!) to mix, try this. Buy two large jars, dump them into a bowl and mix with an electric hand mixer or the paddle of a stand mixer. Then scoop the peanut butter back into the jars and refrigerate. Yes, it's a little messy, but it pays you back with perfectly mixed peanut butter. And you don't have to do it again for a long time.
10. **Make your own peanut butter crackers,** using whole grain crackers and natural peanut butter. Package them so they're ready to grab and go.
11. **Double a recipe and freeze half.** Doubling takes just a few minutes, and it pays you back in spades. For example, I almost always make double batches of shredded pork barbecue, [Spicy Italian Beef](#) and [Family-Friendly Butternut Squash Soup](#), because I love having a "back-up plan" in the freezer.
12. **Bake several sweet potatoes and/or winter squash.** Serve them as side dishes during the week, either plain with just a bit of butter or whipped with butter, brown sugar, cinnamon and a little milk if needed.
13. **Peel very ripe bananas and freeze them in a Ziplock bag,** then use them in smoothies. (I buy extra bananas for this purpose.)
14. **Brown a double batch of ground beef,** one to use for a meal this week and one to freeze for another meal.
15. **Make hummus.** Use it during the week as a dip with vegetables or crackers or spread on wraps or sandwiches.



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16. **Cook oatmeal in the Crockpot overnight.** This is an easy way to have a healthy breakfast ready in the morning. Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life shared [a great recipe for Crockpot oatmeal](#) (as well as other quick ways to make oatmeal).

17. **Make a double batch of pizza dough and freeze half.** I've started making a double batch, and sometimes two double batches, of [the pizza dough my family loves](#). It takes almost no extra time, and lets me make pizza for dinner on days when I don't have time to make dough. I take frozen dough out of the freezer in the morning and



let it thaw and rise all day.

18. **Make a double or triple batch of a healthy snack your family likes, such as energy bars, granola bars or energy bites.** Find a real food snack that your family likes and make a lot of it. Package some of it for grab-and-go use this week, and freeze the rest. My family loves my [Homemade Energy Bars](#), and my friend Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life has a yummy recipe for [Chocolate Energy Bites](#).

19. **Boil and peel some eggs.** Boil and cool as many eggs as you'll use in 3-4 days, then cool and peel them. Use them for lunches or snacks or add them to a big salad to make a meal.

20. **Make a master meal list.** This idea comes from my friend Christina, author of *Juggling Real Food and Real Life*, and it's a great one. Make a list of all of your "tried and true" recipes and refer to it when making your weekly menu, or when your meal plan falls apart and you have to come up with a new plan quickly. I haven't done this yet - it may be one of my mini-projects for this weekend! Check out Christina's [article on meal planning and the master meal list](#).

21. **Make a list of healthy food items you want to have on hand and start stocking up.** A pantry stocked with whole grain pasta, brown rice, canned diced tomatoes, canned beans (black, kidney or other), natural peanut butter and other healthy staples can



keep you out of the drive-thru line! Healthy staples provide lots of options for quick lunches and dinners when your day doesn't go as planned. So make a master list and purchase a few items on the list each time you go to grocery shopping.

22. **Cook a big batch of brown rice and freeze some of it.** Brown rice is healthy and delicious, but it's definitely not a fast food. On many nights, if the choice is between brown rice and instant white rice, the instant rice is going to win! So cook a double or triple batch and freeze some to use on nights when you just don't have 50 minutes to wait for the rice to cook!

I hope that these meals and tips help you serve your more family healthy meals and snacks in spite of your busy schedule.

