



Cook Ahead, Live Better: Your Meal Prep Starting Point

A practical introduction to planning, preparing, and cooking meals with purpose

Build kitchen skills that can make everyday choices work harder for you.

SHAD EDDIE MONGRUE

Free preview edition · pages 1–2

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01

Why Your Kitchen Matters

Food choices shape your daily routine, yet busy days can push cooking to the back burner. A little planning gives you more ways to choose what works for your table.

- ◆ In 2023, restaurants accounted for more than two-thirds of U.S. food-away-from-home spending.¹
- ◆ Limited-service restaurants received the largest share of food-away-from-home spending through 2023.¹
- ◆ Spending on food away from home rose 12 percent in 2023.²
- ◆ These spending patterns make cooking skills useful tools for building choices that fit your routine.

Meal preparation gives you another way to decide what to cook, what to buy, and when to get started. You do not need to cook every meal at home. Start by building a few reliable options, then adjust them to your preferences, time, and kitchen. A useful plan is one you can return to when the week gets busy. Next, try a quick planning exercise you can finish today.

INSIDE THIS BOOK

You'll plan one meal, learn core preparation ideas, and follow a simple weeklong starter plan. Then you'll explore practical kitchen skills and ways to make thoughtful food choices.

02

Plan One Meal Today

Take a short break today to plan a meal you already enjoy. You can begin with familiar ingredients and skills, without buying special equipment or mapping out every meal.

- ◆ Choose a familiar meal that fits your routine and uses skills you already have.
- ◆ Check your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer before writing a shopping list.
- ◆ List only the ingredients you still need, then compare your shopping options.
- ◆ Pick a preparation time and decide which small task you can do ahead.

Keep the plan easy to finish. Depending on your meal, you might gather ingredients, wash produce, cook a grain, or prepare a sauce. Put the items you plan to use where you can find them. If your schedule changes, simplify the meal or choose another one. The goal is a clearer next step, not a perfect menu. Next, you'll see how planning and preparation work together.

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You've read the free pages. Here's what the rest of this book covers:

- 3 Make Prep Work Simple
- 4 Build Your Weeklong Rhythm
- 5 Learn Skills, Avoid Waste
- 6 Keep Building Your Skills

BY THE END OF THIS SHELF, YOU WILL

- ◆ A simple meal-planning routine
- ◆ Practical preparation habits
- ◆ More confidence in everyday cooking
- ◆ Thoughtful ways to compare food choices
- ◆ A foundation for stronger kitchen skills

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Sources for the free pages

Every statistic in this book is numbered and links to the page it came from. Each one was checked word for word against its source in October 2026. Figures can change as sources update. This book is for education and is not personal financial, legal, medical or professional advice.

- 1 **USDA Economic Research Service**, Limited-service restaurants captured the largest share of food-away-from-home spending from 2019 to 2023 (2023). <https://ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/109994>
- 2 **USDA, Economic Research Service**, Food-away-from-home spending share peaked in 2023 (2023). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/110112>