

February

Get Organized

I am not shy about my praise for meal planning. See my [October Newsletter](#) for more details and my [weekly menu-planning](#) guide. One challenge of meal planning I frequently hear is how hard it is to fit meal prep into our busy schedules. With all the activities of life (work, practices, family, friends), finding enough time to actually prepare and eat that deliciously planned meal can be tough. That is why freezer meals are a staple at our house. With a couple hours prep time on a Saturday morning, you can have quick meals to feed your family all month long.



Below are just a few tips and great recipes to have stashed in your freezer for those busy (or lazy) days. I would love to hear about any of your freezer meal successes. E-mail me at AGraff@hy-vee.com.

Freezer Meal Tips

Before freezing hot food, it's important to let it cool down. Heat will raise the temperature of the freezer; and the food will not freeze uniformly. The outer edges of the hot dish will freeze hard quickly while the inside might not cool in time to prevent spoilage. Leave as little air as possible in the packages and containers. When freezing liquids in containers, allow a small amount of head room for expansion. When using freezer bags, be sure to remove as much air as possible before closing.

To ensure that your food is safe to eat, follow one of these proper ways to thaw:

- **In the refrigerator:** The slowest but safest thawing technique. Larger items may take an entire day to thaw. So plan accordingly.
- **In cold water:** Place the frozen food in a leak-proof bag and place in a large container of *cold* water.
- **In a microwave on the defrost setting:** Plan to cook the food immediately after it has thawed in a microwave, because some areas of the food might have begun cooking during the defrost cycle.

Freezing food ahead allows you to save time and money and eat healthier. Pulling a meal out of the freezer is faster than the drive-through, delivery or your favorite eat-in restaurant. *So drive past the drive-through, put down the phone, step away from the fat- and salt-laden convenience foods and get a healthy homemade dinner on the table.*

Black Bean Burgers (Servings: 4 burgers)

All you need:

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| 1 (15 oz) can no-salt-added black beans, drained and divided | ½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese |
| ¼ cup chopped onion | 1 tablespoon low-sodium taco seasoning |
| 1 teaspoon minced garlic | ¼ cup frozen corn |
| 1 egg | Assorted burger toppings |
| ½ cup whole wheat bread crumbs | |

All you do:

1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees. In a food processor or blender, mash half the beans and all the onion, garlic, egg, bread crumbs, cheese and taco seasoning until paste-like.
2. Lightly stir in the remaining beans and corn. Form into 4 balls between your hands and flatten into ½-inch- to ¾-inch-thick patties.
3. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet and bake for 30 minutes, flipping once halfway through.
4. Serve with your favorite burger toppings.

Freezing Directions: Prepare above, except do not cook. Place raw burgers into a freezer bag with freezer paper between layers.

To serve: Thaw in the refrigerator overnight. Bake on greased baking sheet at 375 degrees for 30 minutes, flipping once halfway through.

Nutrition per serving: Calories: 220; Total fat: 7 g; Sodium: 550 mg; Total carbohydrate: 29 g; Fiber 6 g; Protein 12 g; Calcium: 20%; Iron 15%

Crock-Pot Mongolian Beef (Servings: 6)

All you need:

- 1.5 pounds beef sirloin steak, cut into stir-fry-sized strips
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ½ teaspoon minced ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup low-sodium soy sauce
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 3 medium green onions, chopped

All you do:

1. Coat steak pieces in cornstarch.
2. Add ginger, garlic, soy sauce, water, brown sugar and carrots to crock-pot and stir well to combine. Place steak into the crock-pot and cook on HIGH for 2-3 hours or on LOW for 4-5 hours.
3. Serve over brown rice or noodles, if desired. Garnish with green onions.



Freezing Directions:

Coat flank steak in cornstarch. Combine remaining ingredients and place in freezer bag. Add steak to bag. Label and freeze. To serve: Thaw. Cook in crock-pot on HIGH for 2-3 hours or LOW for 4-5 hours.

Nutrition per serving: Calories: 340; Total fat: 14g; Sodium: 766mg; Total carbs: 27g; Fiber: 1g; Protein: 25g

Taco Pasta Shells (Yield: 12 shells (6 servings each)).

All you need:

- 1 pound extra-lean ground beef
- 1 envelope low-sodium taco seasoning
- ½ cup water
- 4 ounces fat-free cream cheese, cubed
- 12 uncooked jumbo pasta shells

ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup salsa
- 1 cup taco sauce
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheese
- 1 ½ cups crushed tortilla chips
- ¾ cup (8 ounces) plain Greek yogurt
- 3 green onions, chopped

All you do:

1. In a medium skillet, cook beef over medium heat until no longer pink; drain. Stir in taco seasoning and water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Stir in cream cheese until melted. Transfer to a bowl; cool.
2. Cook pasta according to package directions; drain. Fill each shell with about 3 tablespoons of meat mixture. Place shells in sealable plastic bag. Freeze for up to 3 months.

***To use frozen shells:** Thaw in the refrigerator for 24 hours (shells will be partially frozen). Spoon salsa into a greased 9-inch square baking dish; top with shells, then taco sauce. Cover and bake at 350° for 40 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and chips; Bake 15 minutes longer or until heated through. Serve with Greek yogurt and onions.

Recipe modified from Taste of Home.

Nutrition facts per serving: Calories: 450; Total fat 17 g; Sodium: 1140 mg; Total Carb: 27 g; Fiber: 3 grams, Protein: 38 g; Calcium: 35%, Vitamin A: 25%, Iron: 25%



Tuna, White Bean & Spinach Quesadillas (Serves 4)

All you need:

- 1 (15 oz) can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 (5 oz) can tuna, drained
- 1/4 cup chopped red onion
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 cup light mayonnaise
- 4 whole grain tortillas
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
- 1 cup chopped baby spinach leaves, divided

All you do:

1. In a food processor, blend beans, tuna, red onion, garlic powder and mayonnaise.
2. Spread half the tuna mixture onto one tortilla, all the way to the edges. Top with half the cheese, half the spinach and another tortilla. Repeat with the two remaining tacos, half the filling, cheese and spinach to make a second quesadilla.
3. Lightly spray a non-stick skillet or griddle with cooking spray and cook quesadillas over medium heat. After 5 minutes (or when bottom is golden brown) flip and cook and additional 2-3 minutes. Let cool on plate 5 minutes before cutting into wedges or strips.

Freezing Directions:

Follow directions above. Cool completely. Cut each tortilla into 8 wedges. Transfer to gallon freezer storage bag. Label and freeze.

TO SERVE: Do not thaw. Remove desired number of quesadillas from freezer, reheating in microwave 50% power for 45-60 seconds or until heated through.

Nutrition facts per serving: Calories: 301; Total fat: 8 g; Sodium: 790 mg; Total Carbohydrate: 34 g; Fiber: 6 g; Protein 24 g; Calcium: 25%



Fish and Shellfish 101

With the upcoming Lenten season, many of us are searching for more family-friendly seafood options. Plus, we should be eating more fish and shellfish year-round; why?

- Eating two to three servings of seafood per week can offer big health benefits, such as maintaining brain health and reducing heart disease by 30 percent.
- Seafood contains healthy nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids, iron and B-vitamins, and it doesn't have all the saturated fat as the same serving of other protein foods.
- Eating seafood while you are pregnant/breastfeeding promotes proper brain and eyesight health in developing babies.



Here's more good news—cooking fish is quick and easy! The key to whipping up a spectacular dish that satisfies the entire family is to make the right selections: the right types of fish or shellfish, the right cooking methods and the right recipes.

To encourage the “picky eaters” in your family, try incorporating fish into recipes that are familiar—such as tacos, pizza, quesadillas or burgers. The familiarity of those foods may make it easier for fish “newbies” to try (and enjoy) eating fish. Also, be sure to choose fresh fish. Your fish should not smell “fishy.” Fresh fish or shellfish should smell like saltwater and the sea coast or have a faint (not strong) fish odor.

Fish and seafood cook differently than meat; they are more delicate and cook at a faster rate. The best tool that any chef or home cook has in cooking fish is an instant-read thermometer as fish can quickly go from being undone to overdone in a matter of minutes. Periodically check the temperature with a thermometer so you know when the final cooking point is nearing. Fish should be cooked to 145°F, or until flesh is opaque and flakes with a fork.

Flavors vary greatly among fish and seafood. Here are a few popular options great for “newbies.”

Tilapia: This flaky fish has a mild, sweet flavor. It is usually paired with stronger-tasting spices and herbs, and can be grilled, broiled or baked with great results.

Shrimp: One of the most versatile offerings, shrimp has a nutty, popcorn-like, sweet-savory flavor and can be added to pastas, stir-fries, salads and fajitas. Shrimp cook up in minutes and once cooked, can be eaten warm or cold.

Salmon: This beautifully colored, “meaty” fish is versatile and lends itself well to most flavors. Salmon can be baked, grilled, broiled, roasted or poached. Because of the high fat content (of beneficial omega-3 fatty acids), salmon will take longer to cook than a similarly sized piece of leaner fish.

Perfect Salmon - *My all-time favorite way to cook salmon.*

All you need:

1 salmon fillet
Olive oil
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

All you do:

Place salmon onto a large baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper, to taste. Place the pan in a *cold* oven, then turn the heat to 400°F. Cook for 25 minutes and enjoy.

Serve: with fresh pineapple salsa (see recipe on the next page).



Pineapple Salsa

All You Need:

2 cups chopped fresh pineapple
1/3 cup chopped red bell pepper
1 small jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped
2 green onions, chopped
Juice of 1 lime
1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon brown sugar
Salt, to taste

All You Do:

Combine pineapple, peppers, green onions, lime juice, cilantro, and brown sugar in a bowl. Season with salt to taste.



Lovely Shrimp Kebobs

All you need:

3/4 pound(s) large peeled and deveined shrimp
1 cup(s) grape tomatoes
2 tablespoon(s) olive oil
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1 lemon, cut into wedges (garnish)

All you do:

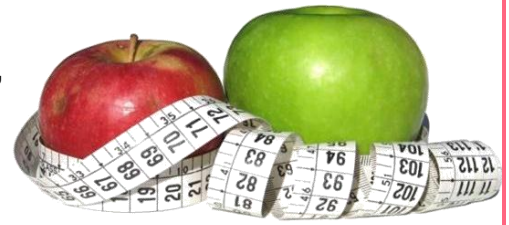
1. Heat grill to medium-high. In a large bowl, toss the shrimp, tomatoes, oil, salt and pepper.
2. On a flat surface, arrange 4 of the shrimp into two heart shapes with a grape tomato in the middle of each “heart.” Push a skewer across the tops of the shrimp, maintaining the natural curve.
3. Place a grape tomato inside each 'heart' and push another skewer across the middle, through the shrimp and the tomatoes. Repeat with remaining shrimp and tomatoes.
4. Grill, turning occasionally, until the shrimp is opaque throughout, 4 to 5 minutes.
5. Squeeze the lemon wedges over the kebabs just before serving.



Eat for Life

The holidays have come and gone and now it is time to kick it into high gear! What a great time to **take control** of your life and start changing the way you live to become a **healthier, happier** version of you!

Sign up for Eat for Life, a **ten-week lifestyle management program** with an emphasis on weight control, fitness and eating for good health. You will attend weekly classes, complete daily food and activity diaries, receive group encouragement and support and set and review personal goals with me, your Hy-Vee dietitian.



Tuesdays, 5:15 – 6:15 p.m., beginning the week of February 26th. The cost for the 10-week program is \$125.

Topics Covered:

- Goal-setting
- Grocery shopping
- Portion control
- Mindless eating
- Fad diets
- Emotional eating
- Energy density of foods
- Plateaus
- Healthy cooking
- Recipe modification
- Disease-fighting foods
- Physical activity

Please call or e-mail AGraff@hy-vee.com if you are interested in signing up. **RSVP required by February 19th.**

A Taste of the Tropics at Hy-Vee

Enjoy a tropical escape without buying airline tickets or packing a suitcase. The sweet flavors and fruity aromas of tropical fruits transport our minds to a far-away, sun-drenched paradise. For winter-weary Midwesterners, tropical fruits from Hy-Vee are your ticket to that far-away place.

Tropical Treasure for Your Health

Tropical fruits bring the benefits of good nutrition with stress relief. As we let our minds drift to pleasant vacation memories or hopes of tropical escapes yet to come, we enjoy the stress relief of a momentary mental vacation. Additionally, paying attention to the aromas and flavors of our foods slows us down and helps us feel more satisfied even when we eat less.

Featured Fruit: Kiwi

Though kiwi grows in subtropical climates, such as California, the fuzzy brown fruit with the vibrant green interior and ring of black seeds is a perfect partner for tropical fruits. Select kiwi that “give” slightly to gentle pressure for best flavor and sweetness. Store firm kiwi at room temperature until they are ripe and then refrigerate. Kiwi is enjoyed for its sweet/tart flavor and how easy it is to enjoy – simply slice the kiwi in half and scoop out the fruit with a spoon. Kiwi a perfect lunchbox fruit, with the added bonus of nutrition superstar status.



Packed with powerful nutrients in a low-calorie package, kiwi fruit scores a perfect 100 on the NuVal™ scale. At just 50 calories per fruit, kiwi is packed with vitamin C to aid in wound healing and iron absorption, potassium for healthy blood pressure and fiber for digestive health. The vibrant green color holds the antioxidant lutein, which promotes healthy eyes and may play a role in preventing age-related macular degeneration.

Taste a Tropical Twist

Put a vibrant, tropical twist on your family's meals this week. It's as simple as topping baked chicken or fish with a unique, fruity salsa or spicing up a fruit salad with an unexpected twist. Try this *Banana-Kiwi Salad* and enjoy the flavor of the tropics:

Banana-Kiwi Salad (Serves 4)

Active time: 25 minutes | Total: 25 minutes

All you need:

- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon Hy-Vee canola oil
- 1 tablespoon minced shallot
- 2 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Hy-Vee honey
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Pinch of cayenne pepper, or to taste
- 4 kiwis, peeled and diced
- 2 firm ripe bananas, cut diagonally into 1/2-inch-thick slices
- 1/2 cup diced red bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh mint
- 2 tablespoons Hy-Vee chopped cashews, toasted (see Tip)



All you do:

1. Whisk lime juice, oil, shallot, vinegar, honey, salt and cayenne in a medium bowl.
2. Add kiwis, bananas, bell pepper and mint; toss to coat. Serve sprinkled with cashews.

TIP: To toast nuts on the stovetop, cook in a small dry skillet over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until fragrant and lightly browned, 3 to 5 minutes.

Per serving: 170 calories; 6 g fat (1 g sat, 3 g mono); 30 g carbohydrate; 1 g added sugars; 3 g protein; 5 g fiber; 151 mg sodium; 2177 mg potassium.
Nutrition bonus: Vitamin C (190% daily value), Potassium & Vitamin A (15% dv).

Source: adapted from Eating Well, Inc.

RD Recommended Products

Dannon Light & Fit Greek yogurt - Great for breakfast or grab-and-go snack, Dannon Light & Fit Greek yogurt has only 80 calories and twice the protein of regular protein. Four-pack flavors include blueberry, cherry, strawberry, vanilla, pineapple, raspberry and peach.



Wonderful Pistachios - American Heart Month is here, and there's one more reason to love pistachios. Wonderful Pistachios Lightly Salted and No Salt packages will proudly carry the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark, a trusted label for shoppers who are navigating the grocery store looking for heart-healthy products.

Pistachios deliver a bevy of nutrients, and a one-ounce serving (about 49 kernels) of Wonderful Pistachios Lightly Salted provides 160 calories, 6 grams of protein, 3 grams of fiber, 310 milligrams of potassium and only 80 milligrams of sodium—that's just 3% of the Daily Value for sodium. [Click HERE for a coupon.](#)