

In the Kitchen – Meal Time Formula – by Marcy Lytle

I see “formulas” crafted everywhere, especially in the fashion industry. So I thought, why not a formula for meal time to use when grocery shopping? I know busy moms and dads, as well as couples with grown children, or anyone at all that shops for meals finds it maddening at times to put together a list of lunches and dinners. It can be daunting, with all the choices out there, all the recipes and yet we don’t know where to begin. Maybe this shopping list will help you as you plan your meals, and make it all a bit easier.

Things to have on hand for easy meals:

- Fruit – Pick a couple kinds you love, wash them, and store them so that they last more than a few days. A berry keeper box is perfect for this!
- Veggies – Have either frozen or fresh or packaged, whatever works for your lifestyle. But have at least three varieties...ready to add to weeknight meals.
- Avocados, lemons and tomatoes – These three are the holy grail for making meals sing.
- Cucumbers, carrots, olives, hummus pita chips – If you have these in your fridge, you can pull together a charcuterie type meal in no time.
- Herbs like parsley and cilantro and any others you love, along with salad greens – a must-have! Any time you make a salad, add all the herbs, a tasty dressing, and it’s a winner!
- Protein for your meals like beans or chickpeas and bacon – to use instead of expensive meats and chicken all the time. My gosh, the bowls you can create with just these three toppings.
- Ingredients for sandwiches – whatever is not listed above...your deli meat, cheeses, breads.
- Nut butters and jams and biscuits and bacon – yes to all these. Have a biscuit/jam night!
- Pesto – Buy it or make it – and use it. It’s delicious on veggies, baked potatoes, pasta, and even mixed in a drained and rinsed can of pinto beans.
- Brown rice – this one staple can be the base for SO MANY meals, topped with whatever you create for a delicious bowl of goodness.
- Something crunchy – this satisfies most everyone – whether it’s healthy chips (Siete) or nuts of all kinds, or crackers. And granola – homemade of course!

Ideas for putting these things together:

BLT – or any sandwich – If you have sandwich ingredients on hand, you can pull together a meal quickly that’s easy and tasty. Consider these thin wheat rounds instead of thick bread, and set out all your things – and let the family build.

Pizzas – These don’t have to be boring, and they can include toppings other than pepperoni and red sauce! Use that pesto, your leftover chicken, some of those roasted veggies, and create a masterpiece! Buy premade Naan bread for the base!

Frito Pie (revisited) – It doesn’t have to be Fritos topped with chili and cheese, although that’s amazing. But consider adding all those veggies on top for a mountain of goodness! We recently added tomatoes and avocados and cucumbers!

Rice Bowls – Whether you add ground meat and greens, with other tasty things...or you put together a medley of all the veggies you have in the fridge, you can set out the rice and let the family put together their own meal.

Jazz it Up – If you want potato salad, for instance, but you don't want to peel and bake...add store bought potato salad and add some fresh dill, cooked and crumbled bacon and red onion. Stir it in, and it's delicious. I took this to a party and no one knew it was pre-made!

Little trios – If you have some crackers, pickles and cheese...you can make easy and yummy snacks for the kids, and you! Layer a Ritz with a pickle slice (pat it dry) and a square of cheese (we used Havarti), then sprinkle with something from your spices that you like. Bake until cheese melts.

Look at that list above and just make sure you have all those each week. Then decide if you want:

A bowl

A pizza

A pile up

A trio

A sandwich

A jazzed up prepared meal

A leftover creation

Grab from your stocked pantry and fridge, and create different combos with all that fresh goodness. And if all else fails, make canned biscuits and put out the jellies and jams, meats and cheeses, and let everyone make their own biscuit supper.

And let fruit be the dessert. Grab some grapes, or cut up an apple, or set out the strawberries. Include a caramel drizzle or some dark chocolate to go with. Or graham crackers, too!

Hope this helps!