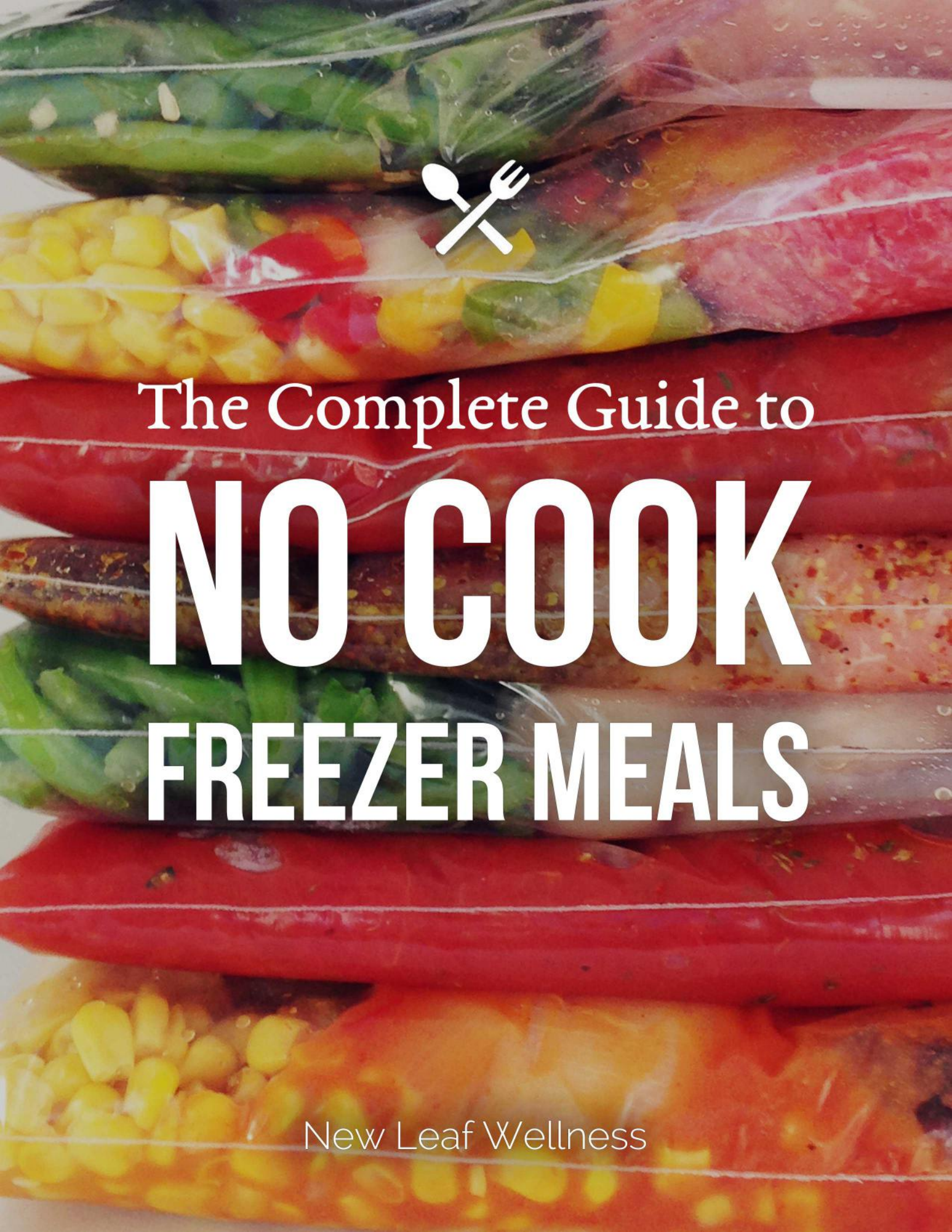


The Complete Guide to NO COOK FREEZER MEALS

New Leaf Wellness

The Complete Guide to No Cook Freezer Meals.

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This book was written to help educate readers about freezer meals. The author is not liable for the use of misuse of information provided. More information about food safety can be found on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service's website.

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www.newleafwellness.biz

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INTRODUCTION

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is that they make it possible for me to always have a home-cooked, real food, healthy meal no matter how busy my day is, especially when it's a long day that leaves me too tired to cook."

-Heather



MY BACKGROUND WITH FREEZER COOKING

I started making freezer meals after my first child was born. Freezing a casserole for a holiday or birthday party meant I could enjoy the day with my daughter and husband instead of spending it in the kitchen.

Seven years and three more children later, I still use freezer meals to simplify our busy lives. I froze two weeks' worth of dinners before my second daughter was born and a MONTH of dinners before my third daughter was born.

Sure, I freeze meals for births and special events, but I also use freezer meals to help us eat homemade meals more often than take-out. We eat homemade dinners six nights a week, and freezer meals are a big part of making that happen.

Consider this book my attempt to hold your hand and walk you through the process. I promise that freezer cooking is much easier and quicker than you think, especially if you make 'no-cook' freezer meals.

Most of my 'no-cook' recipes are frozen and then cooked in a slow cooker or crockpot. Crock-pot® is simply a brand of slow cooker, so I'll use the term slow cooker in this book.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE 'NO-COOK' FREEZER MEALS?

'No-cook' freezer meals don't require any cooking before freezing. Simply combine the meats, vegetables, sauces and spices, and freeze!

Since 'no-cook' freezer meals don't require any cooking ahead of time, they're very easy and quick to make. They're also absolutely delicious when eaten because they don't taste like leftovers at all.

Don't just take my word for it. Throughout this book you'll find quotes from other women who have served their families healthy, homemade freezer meals and saved lots of time, money, and stress along the way.

Ready to stock your freezer? Let's get started!

THE BENEFITS OF FREEZER COOKING

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is the joy of discovering that I don't have to find something to make for dinner or find the time to make it. All I have to do is thaw, put it in the crockpot and relax. Dinner is served!"

–Jill



Once you get the hang of freezer cooking, I know you'll be hooked. I simply can't say enough good things about it.

Since you're reading this book, you must already be somewhat motivated to start freezer cooking. The way I see it, there are five major benefits.

SAVE TIME

Freezer meals require time upfront to prep, but no time the day of cooking (or very little time). If you prep multiple freezer meals at once, you'll only have to get out your cutting board, knives, and pans once. (And you'll only have to wash them once too. Wahoo!)

'No-cook' freezer meals are much faster to prep than traditional freezer meals that are fully cooked before freezing.

SAVE MONEY

There are several ways that freezer cooking can save you money. You can take advantage of sales at the grocery store and buy items to freeze. You can also buy food in bulk (which is often cheaper) and freeze what you don't use. Once you get the hang of making freezer meals, you can even get creative with meat and produce that are going to expire (what a waste of money!) and turn them into freezer meals instead.

HELP YOUR FAMILY EAT HEALTHIER

Having dinner waiting in the freezer means that you don't have to stop at the drive-thru as often. If you freeze healthy, homemade freezer meals with vegetables, then your family is likely to eat them. You can control exactly which ingredients go into every recipe and what quality of ingredients you use (for example, organic, low sodium, low fat, etc.). I provide the nutritional information for all the recipes in my eBooks so you can decide what is best for your family to eat.

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

Making 'no-cook' freezer meals is fast, easy, and addicting! When you freeze meals ahead of time, you can cross "cook dinner" off your daily 'to-do' list and devote that time to something else instead. Not only can freezer meals simplify your daily routine, but simple, 'no-cook' freezer meals can help you prepare for holidays, birthday parties, births, and surgeries too.

HELP OTHERS

Freezer meals make wonderful gifts for other people. I've made freezer meals for my parents, pregnant friends, and sick community members. Other people have told me that they've shared freezer meals with elderly grandparents, traveling spouses, grown children, friends having surgery, and more. It seems like everyone appreciates a healthy, home-cooked meal and making a 'no-cook' freezer meal doesn't require much time or money on your part. It's a win-win for everyone involved.

GETTING STARTED

"I love making freezer meals because, to be honest, I am not a very good cook. With freezer meals I know I can make good, healthy, delicious meals at home."

-Lisa



CLEAN OUT YOUR FREEZER

Before you do anything else, do yourself a favor and clean out your freezer to make space for your freezer meals. If anything in your freezer is expired, throw it in the trash (or put it down your garbage disposal). If there is food in your freezer that has been in there for over a year, get rid of it. I hate wasting food, but consider this your free pass. You are never going to eat that food and it is holding you back from filling your freezer with healthy, homemade meals.

When you start stocking your freezer with new, 'no-cook' freezer recipes, you can use the freezer inventory sheet at the end of this book to keep track of what is in your freezer and when it's going to expire. You'll never have to waste food again.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

I don't use any fancy equipment when prepping my freezer meals. On page 18, you'll find more information about what I use to package and label my freezer meals.

The only piece of equipment that I recommend purchasing is a slow cooker (AKA Crock-pot), if you don't already own one. Here are a couple of slow cookers that I recommend:

- Basic Model (I own both of these and they work great): Hamilton Beach 4-Quart Slow Cooker and Crock-Pot 7-Quart Slow Cooker
- Advanced Model (Includes a timer and latch for taking food on-the-go): Crock-Pot 6-Quart Programmable Cook and Carry Slow Cooker
- Premier Model (Includes a 26-hour programmable timer and 3 temperature settings): All-Clad 6.5-Quart Slow Cooker

Most freezer meals will last in a standard freezer attached to a refrigerator up to three months. My family has no problem eating our freezer meals during this time period. (In fact, I'm always tempted to use our freezer meals right after freezing them!) If you need more space for freezing, or would like to freeze your meals for longer periods of time, I recommend purchasing a chest freezer like these:

- Danby 3.6 cubic feet chest freezer
- Danby 7 cubic feet chest freezer

I recently purchased an upright freezer (Kenmore model #22442) and I like it a lot. I store my freezer meals in it, so the refrigerator/freezer in my kitchen can be used for frozen food that I buy at the grocery store, like frozen vegetables, chicken nuggets, and ice cream.

These items are not necessary, but help me to make freezer meals quickly:

- Jokari Hands-Free Baggy Holders (amazing way to hold bags upright)
- 8-inch Chef's Knife (perfect for chopping veggies)
- Vidalia Chop Wizard (very helpful for dicing onions)

Disclosure: The materials listed above include Amazon Associate links and I earn a very small percentage of the sales price if you purchase something after clicking on them.

INGREDIENTS

The quality of ingredients will affect the taste and nutritional value of your freezer meals. Please buy the best ingredients that you can afford – that means local, "USDA-certified organic" vegetables, meats, and dairy products.

If you're trying to decide what to buy organic, the Environmental Working Group provides a list of popular fresh produce items rated by amount of pesticide residue. Some people try to buy the top 12 items on the list organic because they contain the most pesticides. Referred to as the "Dirty Dozen™," these foods are: Apples, strawberries, grapes, celery, peaches, spinach, sweet bell peppers, nectarines (imported), cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, snap peas (imported), and potatoes. (See the full list here.)

Organic ingredients are often more expensive than non-organic, but you might be able to save money by buying from local farms and farmers' markets. If you're not able to buy organic ingredients, you can still prepare healthy and nutritious freezer meals for your family. Remember, home cooking is almost always much cheaper and healthier than eating out!

The quality of meat is especially important in frozen slow cooker meals. I recommend following my ingredient lists exactly. Buy the sizes and cuts of meat that are listed in the recipes at the end of this book. For chicken recipes, do not buy chicken tenders or thin-sliced breasts – both of these cuts of meat are more likely to dry out in the slow cooker.

I recommend shredding your own cheese whenever you can. It simply tastes better than the store-bought, pre-shredded stuff.

HOW TO PICK A FREEZER RECIPE

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is that it becomes our family fast food and thus saves us money when we don't plan so well or the unexpected comes up."

–Cheryl



If you purchased this eBook as part of my Complete Freezer Meal Bundle, then you're stocked with recipes to help you get started. Every eCookbook includes 'no-cook' recipes, freezer meal tips, step-by-step instructions on how to freeze and cook every meal, and printable grocery lists and freezer labels. You'll also find the nutritional information for every recipe so you can decide which recipes are best for you and your family.

If you want to adapt some of your favorite recipes into 'no-cook' freezer recipes, here is some guidance about what freezes well and what doesn't.

SOME OF THE BEST AND WORST FOODS TO FREEZE

BEST

- Chilis, stews, and soups (non-milk based)
- Beef roasts and pork roasts
- Casseroles
- Baked pastas with tomato sauce

WORST

- Some dairy (like mayonnaise, cream cheese, and sour cream)
- Crumb toppings
- Fried foods
- Fruits and vegetables with a high-water content (like melons and lettuce)
- Meals with uncooked potatoes or rice

Now, I know someone is going to read this book and tell me that they make a fried watermelon casserole with raw potatoes that freezes great. If you already have recipes in your cooking repertoire that you know freeze well, keep making them the way that you know works for you. This is just a general list for people who are new to freezer cooking. I want all your freezer meals to turn out fantastic!

FINDING TIME TO FREEZE

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is I can prep them ahead of time. I sometimes work double shifts, swing and graveyard. Knowing I can put a meal in the crock pot for my family gives me peace of mind."

– Victoria



I have four basic strategies for stocking my freezer with 'no-cook' freezer meals.

DOUBLE A RECIPE TO MAKE ONE FOR DINNER AND ONE FOR THE FREEZER

Freezing a second batch of what I'm making for dinner is one of my favorite freezer strategies. Since I'm making the same meal for dinner, it doesn't require setting aside any extra time to make the freezer meal. I barely notice the extra money spent at the grocery store, and sometimes I even find better deals because I'm buying the ingredients in bigger quantities.

PREP A COUPLE OF 'NO COOK' FREEZER MEALS AT ONCE

Since most of my freezer recipes don't require any cooking ahead of time, they can be prepped very quickly. If I have the necessary ingredients on-hand, I can easily package 3-4 'no-cook' freezer meals while my dinner is cooking in the oven. I can also squeeze in some freezer meal prep first thing in the morning when my daughters are waking up, in the afternoon when my baby is napping, and over the weekend when my husband is home to help.

HAVE A BIG FREEZER MEAL PREP DAY

Setting aside a block of time to prep freezer meals is a great way to stock your freezer. When I was pregnant with my third daughter, I got together with my mom and prepped 16 meals in four hours (and that included a break for lunch, interacting with my two daughters, and cleaning up). I also organized a "no-cook freezer meal prep party" with two of my best friends, and that was a lot of fun. If you would rather work alone at home, that works too. You'll find my best tips for planning a big freezer meal prep day on page 29 of this book.

ORGANIZE A FREEZER MEAL SWAP WITH FRIENDS

Another great way to stock your freezer is to swap meals with friends. Most of my swaps have been with a group of five women (including myself). We each make five batches of the same freezer meal, keep one, and give the remaining four freezer meals to the other four women in the group. That way we each end up with five different freezer meals. Not only is this a creative way to try new recipes, but it can also save you time and money because you are prepping five batches of the same dish. More info about organizing successful freezer meal swaps can be found on page 33 of this book.

ASSEMBLING 'NO-COOK' FREEZER MEALS

"As a working person, (I am gone from home 12 hours per working day) I find that planning ahead and prepping freezer meals leads to healthier, cost effective meals."

–Deborah



Assembling no-cook freezer meals is easy once you get the hang of it. Here's what you need to do to make sure that they're prepared and packaged correctly.

By the way, don't feel overwhelmed by this information or feel pressured to memorize it. All the recipes in my eBooks contain step-by-step instructions that explain exactly how to prepare, package, and cook them.

PREP

If you're trying to convert a regular recipe to a 'no-cook' freezer recipe, follow the recipe's instructions *until the point that you would put the meal into your oven or slow cooker*. This is how you end up with a 'no-cook' freezer recipe that cooks for the first time out of your freezer.

- If the recipe says to add the ingredients to your oven or slow cooker totally raw, then you can freeze them raw, too. For example, I freeze loaves of raw carrot bread, raw meatloaves, raw beef roasts in sauce for my slow cooker, and raw veggies in broth for slow cooker soups. Pay attention to the list of "best and worst foods to freeze" on page 13 and you should be fine.

- If the recipe calls for some cooking before putting the food into your oven or slow cooker, do that cooking before freezing. For example, if the recipe tells you to cook the pasta before assembling the casserole and baking it in the oven, cook the pasta. Then, assemble the casserole, cool to room temperature, and freeze. (Note: Technically, these recipes aren't 'no-cook' freezer meals because they require some cooking prior to freezing. Often, they can still be easy to prepare and delicious when cooked though.)

- Some recipes will tell you to brown ground meat before adding it to your slow cooker, but I add ground meat to my slow cooker freezer meals raw. Browning the meat only takes more time and creates more dirty dishes.

If you're nervous about combining raw meat and vegetables, don't worry: It's perfectly safe. You'll find more information on food safety in the Frequently Asked Questions section of this book (see page 37).

Since all of your meals are frozen at a point when they're ready to be cooked, there's no reason why you can't skip freezing altogether and put your prepped meal right into your slow cooker or oven instead. Just keep an eye on the cooking time because the meal will probably be finished cooking sooner than it would if it was frozen first.

PACKAGING

If you package and store your freezer meals correctly, you should not have any problems with leaking or freezer burn.

FOR SLOW COOKER RECIPES

- Store meals in gallon-sized plastic freezer bags. I use name-brand freezer bags with a zipper on top and they never leak. (Do NOT buy the cheap bags! I've tried them and the bags always tear.)

- Fill your plastic freezer bag like this: beans and vegetables at the bottom, sauces and spices in the middle, and meat at the top (like the image below). Your sauces and spices won't stick to your freezer bag, and your meat will be the first thing poured into your slow cooker. (Which is want you want - your meat closest to the heating source!)

- Remove as much air as possible before sealing the bag. This is important because it will help your meal stay fresh longer and prevent freezer burn. Not removing enough air is one of the most common mistakes made by freezer cooking newbies! (You can watch me demonstrate how to remove air from freezer bags in this YouTube video.)

- After sealing the bag, distribute the contents of the bag as evenly as possible so your meal can be frozen flat and stacked in your freezer to save space.

FOR OVEN RECIPES

- Store your freezer meal in an aluminum pan; I do not recommend freezing in glass because it is not meant to go straight from the freezer into the oven so it might break. If you are planning to freeze your meal for a long time, you may want to use a disposable pan because your pan will be out of commission while it's in the freezer. For example, if you only own one loaf pan and freeze a meatloaf in it, then you won't be able to bake banana bread until you eat the meatloaf.

- Place a layer of plastic wrap on top of your dish and then cover with a layer of aluminum foil.

- If you are stacking multiple casseroles in your freezer, place layers of cardboard in-between the casserole dishes so they don't collapse into one another.

Exceptions: I have some oven recipes that are not frozen in pans, for example my Chicken & Broccoli Calzones and Oatmeal Raisin Cookies. To freeze items like these in individual portions, I place them in the freezer on cookies sheets until they're frozen and then package them. (This is called, "flash freezing.")

After they're frozen, I wrap my calzones with a layer of wax paper, cover with a layer of foil, and store in gallon-sized plastic freezer bags. (I recommend wax paper over parchment paper for cold storage, like the freezer. Just be sure to remove the wax paper before cooking because it will melt in the oven. If you want to cook with the paper, use parchment paper instead.)

After my cookie dough is frozen, I store it in a gallon-sized plastic freezer bag.

LABELING

I recommend labeling your plastic bags and foil tops before adding the food to the bag or pan. This is important because it's hard to write neatly on lumpy bags and collapsing casserole tops.

Use a pen or Sharpie marker (other types of markers will rub off) to label your freezer meals. You can also use the printable recipe cards in the back of this book to label your meals. Simply print on regular computer paper, cut out and fill out, and tape to your freezer meals with clear shipping tape.

All of my eBooks contain filled out freezer meal labels that you can print on Avery water-resistant labels and stick to your freezer bags. My Complete Freezer Cooking Bundle also includes a pdf file that allows you to add your own recipes and print on Avery stickers (and save to re-use again in the future!).

LABEL YOUR FREEZER MEALS WITH THE FOLLOWING

- To thaw overnight in the refrigerator before cooking (if necessary)
- Ingredients, if any, that need to be added the day of cooking
- Cooking instructions
- Use-by date (most freezer meals will last in a standard freezer attached to a refrigerator up to three months)

It's especially important to include cooking instructions when someone else will be cooking the food, for example, a spouse or teenager who adds the meal to the slow cooker in the morning. Your labels will also include ingredients, if any, that need to be added the day-of cooking.

When you give freezer meals to friends and family as gifts, they will appreciate knowing what ingredients are inside and how to cook the meal.

HOW TO ADAPT FOR MORE OR LESS PEOPLE

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is having a healthy, home cooked meal waiting in the freezer to be made. It reduces prep time on busy mornings yet still allows you to have a hot meal at dinner time."

–Jennifer K.



The number of servings varies per recipe, but most of my recipes have an average of six. In most cases, I recommend making the recipes as-written because they are designed to use all of the ingredients and leave nothing to go to waste. (For example, many of my recipes call for a pound of meat or a can of beans so you won't have any ingredients leftover.)

My husband and I have no problem eating all of the food, even when one or more of our children refuses to eat with us. We also look forward to eating leftovers for lunch the next day.

If you are cooking for a large crowd, or one or two people with small appetites, these tips will help you adapt your freezer meals for more or less people.

ADAPTING FREEZER MEALS FOR MORE PEOPLE

In most cases, the easiest way to increase the number of servings in a meal is to increase the amount of meat. This is especially easy to do in a meat-heavy dish, like slow cooker chicken breasts or a pot roast. Simply increase the amount of meat 1-2 pounds and keep the remaining ingredients the same (I usually assume one pound of meat will feed three people.).

If you need to increase the amount of servings in a large freezer meal, like most slow cooker soup recipes, I recommend doubling the ingredients and freezing in two separate bags. You will also need to cook in two slow cookers because the ingredients will not fit in one.

ADAPTING FREEZER MEALS FOR LESS PEOPLE

If you are only cooking for one or two people, I recommend splitting the recipe into two freezer bags or two cake pans. That way you will still use the full amount of ingredients, but produce smaller meals. This is how I prepare meals for my grandparents and it works out great.

For smaller slow cooker freezer meals, cook in a smaller slow cooker (2-4 quarts). Most meals will need to cook 8 hours on low. (This is my favorite 2 ½ quart slow cooker.)

For smaller stovetop and oven meals, cook the same amount of time as the full recipe.

THAWING FREEZER MEALS

"A few weeks ago, I made six freezer meals. I had no thought of making them for someone else, however, my boss's husband was having surgery and she was talking about how she hadn't had time to go to the grocery store and I could tell she was stressed about how she was going to get everything done. I gave her half of the meals. Easy-peasy. Helped her out and made me feel good about helping someone else."

–Jennifer W.



THAWING TECHNIQUES

Most freezer meals need to be thawed before cooking. Thawing helps your meal cook more evenly, quickly, and safely (especially for meals with raw meat). It will also help your slow cooker meal fit in your slow cooker. (Because it's hard to fit a frozen square block in an oval-shaped slow cooker!)

There are three safe ways to thaw your meals: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave. (Note that "on your kitchen countertop" is not included in this list!)

I thaw my slow cooker meals by placing them in the refrigerator the night before I'm planning to cook them. They are not 100% thawed in the morning, but they are thawed enough to fit in my slow cooker and they always cook well. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends thawing small items overnight in your refrigerator and other foods for a day or two.

For quicker thawing, you can place your frozen freezer meal in cold water. Make sure the water stays cold and replace the water every 30 minutes. If your plastic bag leaks, or water is introduced into your plastic bag or casserole dish, the meal may be watered down or contaminated with bacteria. (This is why I recommend purchasing quality freezer bags and thawing overnight in the refrigerator.)

You can also thaw freezer meals in the microwave. Most of my freezer meals are not stored in microwave-safe dishes/bags, so I do not thaw them this way. If you want to thaw in the microwave, make sure to transfer to a microwave-safe dish.

After thawing, cook immediately.

For some of my freezer oven meals, I skip the thawing step and cook them straight out of the freezer (For example, the recipes in my Oven Freezer Meals eBook). The only real benefit for skipping the thawing step is that you don't have to remember to move your freezer meal to the refrigerator! If you decide to skip the thawing step, I recommend monitoring your meal while it is cooking to make sure that it doesn't burn.

TIPS FOR REMEMBERING TO THAW

Most people dislike thawing freezer meals because they forget to do it ahead of time. Here are 10 easy ways to remember to thaw freezer meals:

1. Set a reminder on your smartphone. (This is my husband's favorite method.)

2. Associate thawing meals with something that you do every day, like cleaning up your kitchen after dinner.

3. Ask your kids or spouse to remind you.

4. Plans your meals ahead of time and write them in your planner.

5. Keep a copy of your meal plan everywhere you can possibly see it. (I like to hang a printed calendar on my refrigerator and keep a digital list on my computer and phone with the Cozi app.)

6. Stick a post-it note to your freezer door.

7. Display your weekly meal plan in your home where you can't help but see it. (This is my favorite method. I have a chalkboard hanging in my dining room with our weekly "dinner menu" written on it.)

8. Write yourself a note and place it on the kitchen counter.

9. Keep your crockpot sitting on your kitchen counter.

10. Hang your car keys on a magnetic hook attached to the freezer.

COOKING FREEZER MEALS

"Including myself there are three firefighters in my house. Never knowing when the pager will go off, there have been many times one or all of us miss a meal because of a call. Freezer meals make it easier for us to have a healthy meal at a moment's notice."

–Joy



This is the fun part – cooking and eating your frozen food! Wahoo!

Follow your recipe's instructions for cooking your meal in your slow cooker or oven. When you're first getting started with freezer meals, check your meal at the end of your recipe's recommended cooking time and add more time as needed.

FROZEN SLOW COOKER RECIPES

Frozen slow cooker recipes may require an extra 1-2 hours of cooking. All of my slow cooker recipes have been tested in my 4-quart and 7-quart slow cookers (more info about my specific slow cookers is detailed on page 10 of this book). Slow cookers work best when they are at least 1/3 full, but no more than 2/3 full. You may need to alter the amount of ingredients or cooking time if you are using a slow cooker that is smaller or larger than mine.

Some of my recipes include a wide range for the recommended cooking time (for example, "Cook on the 'low' setting for 4-8 hours.") This is because every slow cooker is different. A large, powerful slow cooker will cook freezer meals much faster than a small, less powerful one. If a recipe's recommended cooking time is longer than what your slow cooker typically need to cook a meal, DECREASE THE COOKING TIME. (There's no reason to overcook and ruin your meal just because someone else's slow cooker is less powerful than yours!) In you are brand new to slow cooking, you may need to experiment a bit to get used to your slow cooker's cooking times.

I cook all of my frozen slow cooker recipes on the "low" setting. If you use the "high" setting, cut the cooking time in half. If you need to be out of the house longer than the recommended cooking time, here are some suggestions:

- If you have a lower setting on your slow cooker, use it. For example, some slow cookers have two "low" settings. One that says "8 hours" and one that says "10 hours." Use the "10 hours" setting.

- Double the recipe. More food in the slow cooker = more time needed to cook it.

- For recipes with sauce, double the amount of sauce.

- Use a regular light timer to control when your slow cooker turns on and off. I don't recommend doing this – because it means food will be sitting in your slow cooker at a temperature where it can spoil – but several moms have told me that it works for them and their families.

- Buy a new slow cooker with a timer that will switch to the “warm” setting at a pre-programmed time (You can find my recommendation for a programmable slow cooker on page 10). Think of this purchase as an investment in your sanity and your family’s health!

FROZEN OVEN RECIPES

Frozen oven recipes may need an additional hour of cooking. If necessary, cover the top of your casserole dish with foil so your freezer meal doesn’t burn.

TIPS FOR A BIG FREEZER MEAL PREP DAY

"My favorite thing about freezer meals is they're all ready for you when you're tired or don't feel like cooking after a long day."

–Kandace



If you want to prep a bunch of freezer meals at once, here are some tips to help make your big freezer meal prep day a huge success.

SCHEDULE YOUR FREEZER DAY

Pick a day and time and put it on your calendar. It may be tough to find a big block of time when you're free, but remember how much time this will save you in the long run when you can eat meals from your freezer instead of cooking.

PICK YOUR RECIPES

'No-cook' freezer recipes will make your freezer prep day easier because they don't take a lot of time to prep and don't require a lot of pots and pans. If you're prepping freezer meals with someone else, 'no-cook' freezer recipes will also be more convenient to prep because you both won't need huddle around the kitchen stovetop and oven. (Most of the work will include chopping and mixing, so feel free to spread out to any available surface, like your kitchen counter or dining room table.) I highly recommend the 'no-cook' freezer recipes in my eBooks.

You don't have to do this, but I often double my recipes and make two of each at a time. This saves me money because I can buy the ingredients in larger quantities and saves me time while prepping because the same measurements go into each bag or pan.

I recommend printing the recipes that you choose at this time. That way, you won't waste time searching for them on your computer/tablet/smart phone on the day of prepping. This is also helpful when you're prepping food with other people.

MAKE A GROCERY LIST

A couple of days before your freezer meal prep day, make a grocery list. If you are prepping a lot of meals, this can take an hour or more to do. (I include grocery lists in all of my eBooks to make your life easier!)

When you're making your list, don't forget:

- Kitchen supplies – gallon-sized plastic freezer bags, casserole dishes (aluminum and disposable aluminum work great), Sharpie markers (for labeling), wax paper, plastic wrap, and foil

- Side dishes – like rice, frozen rolls, and frozen vegetables (optional, but nice to have on-hand for a slow cooker soup or roast)

- A cooler or two (if you're going to prep the meals at someone else's house and will need to transport your meals home)

When you're done making a list of everything that you need, check your kitchen to see which ingredients you already have on-hand and which ones you need to buy. If you're going to prep your meals at someone else's house, go ahead and fill a reusable shopping bag with the items that you have on-hand and need to take (like canned goods, spices, and kitchen supplies). Make a list of items to pack the day of your prep day (like refrigerated Worcestershire sauce and frozen peas).

GO GROCERY SHOPPING

If at all possible, grocery shop a day or two before your prep day. If you don't have a lot of extra room in your refrigerator, you may need to wait to go grocery shopping until your prep day. Keep in mind that it will take extra time to shop, and you will probably be more tired at the end of the day.

If you're planning a big prep day with friends, I recommend splitting up the meals that you're going to make. For example, if you have a group of five people planning to prep together, assign each person to one meal and have them buy enough ingredients to make a batch of that meal for each person who is participating in the prep day. This will help keep things simple and each person will have the benefit of saving money by buying their ingredients in bulk. If your group members don't agree on the type and quality of ingredients bought for the recipes (for example, organic, grass-fed beef, name brands, etc.), circulate the ingredient lists for the recipes that you pick ahead of time so everyone can shop for all of their own ingredients instead.

PREP YOUR FREEZER MEALS

Refer to page 16 in this book for more info about prepping, labeling, and storing your meals.

Here are some other helpful tips for a big freezer meal prep day:

- If you need to do any cooking, do it first so the ingredients have enough time to cool to room temperature.

- Peel and chop all of your veggies at once.

- If several recipes instruct you to cut meat into bite-sized pieces, cut all of your meat at once. That way you will only have to wash your cutting board, knife, and hands once.

My only other suggestion is to plan a simple dinner for the night of your prep day. Even though 'no-cook' freezer meals are relatively easy and quick to make, you probably won't feel like cooking anything else when you're done.

CLEAN UP AND MARVEL AT YOUR STOCKED FREEZER!

Clean up, take your meals home in your cooler (if you're prepping at someone else's house), and stack them in your freezer.

Then, give yourself a pat on the back and share a photo of your freezer on Instagram. (Please tag me @kellymcnelis so I can see too!)

ORGANIZING A FREEZER MEAL SWAP

"The convenience of freezer meals gives us much more family time. Meal prep is quick, clean-up is a synch, and it's usually something everyone loves."

-Jennifer G.



A great way to stock your freezer is to organize a freezer meal swap with friends. I recommend organizing your first freezer meal swap with five people (including yourself). Here are five steps that will help make your first freezer meal swap a huge success.

START WITH A PLANNING MEETING

This is the time to discuss the basics of how to make homemade freezer meals. If some (or all) of the women are new to making freezer meals, make sure everyone reads this book, or at the very least, the Freezer Meal 101 tips on my blog. (This is very, very important because it will ensure that everyone knows how to properly prepare, store, and label freezer meals.)

You will also need to plan your freezer meal swap by discussing the following…

THE DATE OF THE SWAP

- 2-3 weeks away is ideal. This is enough time to prep your meals, but a short enough time to keep the excitement going and make sure no one drops out.

- If someone can't make the same date as everyone else, you can 1) see if she's willing to join the next swap instead, 2) see if anyone else participating is willing to transport her meals to/from the swap, or 3) allow her to drop off her meals ahead of time and pick up her swapped meals at a later date (the host will need to have enough freezer space to store them).

THE TIME OF THE SWAP

- Keep the duration short. Remember, you have freezer meals that need to get home to the freezer.

THE TYPE OF MEALS YOU'LL SWAP

- Find out if anyone has food allergies or food preferences.

- Decide if each swapped meal needs to be a complete meal (with meat/vegetables/starch).

- Ask if everyone owns a slow cooker.

THE NUMBER OF MEALS YOU'LL SWAP

- I think five is the magic number. You won't be totally overwhelmed when you're trying to prep your meals and you'll still come home with a good number of freezer meals.

HOW THE MEALS WILL BE PACKAGED

- Gallon-sized plastic freezer bags (for slow cooker freezer meals) and disposable aluminum pans (for oven freezer meals) are probably easiest, but some people may not like disposable pans.

DECIDE WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE

I highly recommend picking an easy, 'no-cook' recipe, like the ones included in my eBooks. Prepping five meals at a time is a lot of work, even when it's multiple batches of the same recipe!

All of my freezer meal recipes are tried and true so if you don't have a recipe in mind, I highly recommend making one of the recipes from this book.
Once you decide what you're going to make, clear out some room in your freezer and go shopping for the necessary ingredients.

PREP YOUR FREEZER MEALS

This is a great time to go back to page 16 in this book review the info about assembling, packaging, and labeling freezer meals. It may sound silly or repetitive but you wouldn't believe how many people package and label meals incorrectly. (They're easy mistakes to make, especially if you're new to freezer cooking.) Re-reading my tips will make sure your meals turn out great.

Consider how prepping five meals is going to be different than only prepping one. For example, if you hate peeling carrots and your recipe calls for a pound of them, you might need to prepare yourself to peel and chop five pounds at once. (Or better yet, consider this when you're picking a recipe and choose something else instead!)

If you can do any prep work ahead of time, it will make your life much easier when you're ready to assemble. For example, peel vegetables, chop meat, etc.

When your freezer meals are ready, label them with the following information:

- The name of the recipe
- Your name
- To thaw, if necessary
- Cooking instructions
- Use-by date

You can also use the cute recipe cards at the end of this book to label your meals.

SWAP

Bring your recipe to hand out with your freezer meals or be prepared to share the link to your recipe online after the swap. (Remember one of the benefits of swapping is trying new recipes, and this will allow you to re-make the ones that you love!)

If you have more than five women participating in your swap, but everyone only prepped five meals, then you won't get to take home every meal at the swap. Figuring out which meals each person takes home can be hectic. Here's an easy way to do it: Assign each swap member a different color. Ask the member to put their color by their pile of meals (You can use construction paper or simply write the name of the color on a white piece of paper). Then put four pieces of paper for each color into a small brown paper bag. Go around the swap, and let ladies take turns picking paper out of the bag until they have four. If they pick their own or a repeat of another in their hand, put it back in the bag. (If this happens at the very bottom of the bag when all of the other colors are gone, ask the ladies to be nice and trade until it works out.)

TAKE YOUR MEALS HOME AND FREEZE!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

"I always make freezer meals for my neighbor who is fighting cancer. It takes nothing to make a little extra, put it in a zip lock bag, deliver it to her home, and just put it in her freezer. What a special gift."

–Shirley



Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about freezer meals. Since I'm not a food safety expert, I follow the guidelines of the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.

IS IT SAFE TO FREEZE RAW MEAT WITH OTHER INGREDIENTS?

Yes! According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, freezing to 0 °F inactivates any microbes — bacteria, yeasts and molds — present in food. Most of my 'no-cook' freezer meals call for freezing raw meat right along with the rest of the ingredients. While some people are wary of combining raw meat with other food, it's totally safe in the freezer.

CAN YOU EAT FOODS WITH FREEZER BURN?

Sometimes. According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, "Freezer burn does not make food unsafe, merely dry in spots. It appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and is caused by air coming in contact with the surface of the food. Cut freezer-burned portions away either before or after cooking the food. Heavily freezer-burned foods may have to be discarded for quality reasons."

WHAT IF WE HAVE A POWER OUTAGE? CAN WE STILL EAT OUR FREEZER MEALS?

It depends. According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service:

> "The food may still be safe to use if ice crystals remain. If the freezer has failed and a repairman is on the way, or it appears the power will be on soon, don't open the freezer door. If the freezer door was left ajar and the freezer continued to keep the food cold, the food should stay safe.
>
> A freezer full of food will usually keep about 2 days if the door is kept shut; a half-full freezer will last about a day. The freezing compartment in a refrigerator may not keep foods frozen as long. If the freezer is not full, quickly group packages together so they will retain the cold more effectively. Separate meat and poultry items from other foods so if they begin to thaw, their juices won't drip onto other foods."

ARE FROZEN FOODS AS HEALTHY AS FRESH FOODS?

Yes! According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, the freezing process does not break down nutrients and the nutritional value should change very little.

DO 'NO-COOK' FREEZER MEALS TASTE AS GOOD AS FRESHLY MADE MEALS?

Yes! Since they're frozen before cooking, no-cook freezer meals cook for the very first time out of your freezer. They don't taste like leftovers at all!

PRINTABLES

"I love making freezer meals for family and neighbors, especially when someone is sick, having a baby, or just having a busy week. Once your freezer is full, you can totally make someone's day with a good, easy meal."

–Ann



Freezer Inventory Sheet

Item	Use by

Recipe

Use by

Ingredients

Directions

Recipe

Use by

Ingredients

Directions

Recipe

Use by

Ingredients

Directions

Recipe

Use by

Ingredients

Directions