



## Tips For Meal Planning During COVID-19

This is such an unusual time. It's hard to plan meals since when you get to the store, you may not find what you're looking for. Or if you're waiting on a delivery – you can't be sure when it will arrive or what will be in it! And the easy pantry meal options suggested in many articles (usually a mixture of rice, beans and corn) may be higher in carbs than you'd like. Here are a few tips to help you with meal planning and shopping during this time when we are working hard to stay in place and stay safe. Also included are three recipes for lower-carb entrees that you can try using commonly available ingredients as well as my new favorite recipe for a simple, no-knead bread.

**Plan meals around what's available** – Start with an inventory of what's in your pantry, fridge and freezer. Make your menus based on what you need to use up. You might want to snap a couple of photos of what you have so when you get to the store, if you find you need to alter your plans, you can be reminded of what you have at home. Have an alternate option for your key items, so if ground beef isn't available - check for ground turkey. If you have several stores in your area, check with friends about which ones seem to have the best selections, or if there is a better day of the week (and time) to go.

**Expand your vegetarian meal options** – Like most people, you may have been aiming to have at least one vegetarian meal a week before the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, with limited meat options (or not enough room in your freezer), this is a great time to try a few more meatless meal recipes. Three new ones are included below.

**Blanch and freeze vegetables** - While the shelves of frozen fruits and veggies are often empty when I go to the store, there is usually a good variety of fresh produce. Stock up on fresh veggies and freeze your own. One important tip...

Blanching is a must for veggies to be frozen. It only takes a few minutes and involves dropping veggies into boiling water and then into an ice bath to stop the cooking. This process slows or stops the enzyme action which can cause a loss of flavor, color and texture. Blanching time is important and varies based on the vegetable and size. Lists for blanching times are easy to find on the internet – but here are a couple of times for common veggies. Once blanched and drained, pack away in freezer bags or containers and don't forget to mark the date.

- Spinach / greens – 2 minutes
- Green beans – 3 minutes
- Broccoli and cauliflower florets – 3 minutes
- Carrots, small, whole – 5 minutes

**Single layer fruit and veggie freezing** – Some produce is best frozen by first laying it out on parchment paper and freezing on a tray in a single layer. This works well for small fruits like berries. It's also a great way to prepare chopped onions and green peppers for freezing. After they freeze, these items can be placed into individual freezer bags. Pre-freezing in a single layer



prevents you from having one big icy clump of onions or berries and it's easier to scoop out what you need, when you need it.

**Back to basics** – Many of us have been rediscovering the joy of cooking. Not fancy, gourmet recipes, but simple basics that our mothers and grandmothers used to make routinely when there were more limited ingredients. Rediscover the pleasure in baking bread, making soup, or even a simple salad dressing from oil, lemon juice or vinegar and Dijon mustard.

**Have a Plan B** – Flexibility and patience is certainly the name of the game when it comes to cooking right now. Your recipe calls for chicken breasts? Use thighs, or canned chicken or cod fish or tofu. Black beans all gone? Kidney beans (light or dark) will give a similar taste. No more canned beans? Dried beans in bags are usually always available. Need to soak them in a hurry? Place the one pound bag of beans in a Dutch oven and add enough water to cover by at least 2 inches. Bring to a boil and boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand for at least one and up to 4 hours. Drain, rinse and use in your recipe. (see other suggestions in chart below)

**Special food safety concerns** – According to the CDC, there is currently no evidence to support the transmission of the COVID-19 virus through food. As always, follow the recommended four food safety guidelines to reduce risk of food poisoning including: ensure hands, counter surfaces and utensils are clean, prevent cross contamination between meat and produce, wash produce in cold running water and cook/store foods at the right temperatures.

| Can't find this...                            | Try this....                                 |
|---|--|
| Canned beans (black, white, chickpeas, etc)   | Dried beans (all the same varieties)         |
| Chicken breasts                               | Canned chicken                               |
| Frozen veggies                                | Buy fresh – and freeze for later use         |
| Ground beef                                   | Ground chicken or soy crumbles (veggie meat) |
| Freezer containers                            | Freezer bags (different sizes; easy to use)  |
| Chicken, beef or veggie broth (can or carton) | Concentrate broth (in a jar; use by the tsp) |

Melinda Maryniuk; April 17, 2020



## Recipes – Back to Basics and Meatless Meals

### 5 Minute No Knead Bread (Adapted from [www.artisanbreadinfive.com](http://www.artisanbreadinfive.com))

Note: This bread is super easy and delicious. I couldn't believe it until I tried it (no kneading?!?!). It makes enough for 3-4 small loaves and is based baked on a pizza or baking stone. The dough stays in the refrigerator (up to 10 days) until you are ready to bake. There are some helpful videos on this website if you want more detail. I did not calculate the nutrition information, but it would be the same as for other breads – a one ounce slice is 15-20 grams carb.

3 cups plus 2 Tbsp lukewarm water (about 100°F)  
1 package (2 ¼ tsp) granulated yeast (instant or active dry)  
1 ½ Tbsp kosher or other coarse salt  
3 ½ cups all-purpose flour  
3 cups whole wheat flour  
Cornmeal or parchment paper

**Step 1: Mix and store the dough.** In a 5-quart container or bowl, mix yeast, water and salt. Add the flours, then use a wooden spoon to stir until uniformly moist. This will be a loose dough. Cover (but not airtight) and allow to rise at room temperature for about 2 hours. Then place in the refrigerator.

**Step 2: Shaping and baking.** You can bake this bread as you need it, and leave the remaining dough in the refrigerator loosely wrapped in plastic (or a non-completely airtight lid) for up to 10 days. While you can bake a portion of the dough after the initial rise, the dough will be easier to work with after at least 3 hours refrigeration. When ready to bake, cut off a grapefruit size piece (roughly 1/3 to ¼ of the dough) using a serrated knife. Quickly shape it into a smooth oblong loaf and place it on a piece of parchment paper or on a cookie sheet sprinkled with cornmeal (so it won't stick). Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise) for about 90 minutes. After about 60 minutes of rising, preheat the oven to 450° and place a baking stone on the middle rack (to heat up) and a broiler pan on the lower shelf. When the oven is nice and hot and the bread is risen, slip it carefully onto the baking stone and pour 1 cup of warm water into the broiler pan. Close the door quickly so the steam won't escape. (This helps create a crispy crust). Bake for 30 minutes. Remove and cool completely on a wire rack. Enjoy!



**Crustless Broccoli Cheese Quiche** (Adapted from [www.skinnytaste.com](http://www.skinnytaste.com))

Note: You can use fresh or frozen broccoli. It can also be easily adapted by adding other vegetables including onions, mushrooms, zucchini and cauliflower. Be adventurous!

Nutrition information: Serves 6. Calories: 175, Carbs: 5 g, Protein 12 g, Fat: 12 grams

- 3 cups chopped broccoli florets
  - 1 cup grated Cheddar or Colby cheese
  - 2/3 cup low-fat milk
  - 1/4 cup half & half cream
  - 5 large eggs
  - 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
  - 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
  - pinch freshly grated nutmeg
  - Nonstick cooking spray
1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Spray a pie dish with oil.
  2. Steam the chopped broccoli florets in the microwave with 1 tablespoon water until tender crisp and green but not mushy, about 2 1/2 to 3 minutes.
  3. Evenly spread the broccoli in the dish and top it evenly with the grated cheddar cheese.
  4. Make the custard mixture by whisking together the milk, half and half, eggs, salt, black pepper, and the nutmeg. Pour the custard into the dish and bake 35 to 40 minutes, until the center is set.
  5. Cut the quiche into 6 pieces and serve.

**One Pot Chickpea Cauliflower Curry** (adapted from [www.minimalistbaker.com](http://www.minimalistbaker.com))

Note: This dish comes together in just 30 minutes and has wonderful Southeast Asian flavors. Serve over fresh greens, steamed spinach, cauliflower rice or grains. If available, add even more flavor by topping with thinly sliced red onions, lime wedges, diced avocado and cilantro.

Nutrition information: Serves 4. Calories: 300, Carbs: 35, Protein: 10 g, Fat: 13 grams.

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1/3 cup shallot (chopped)
- 4 cloves garlic (minced)
- 2 Tbsp fresh ginger (minced)
- 1 small hot pepper (to taste – such as jalapeño; seeds removed and finely chopped)
- 2-4 Tbsp red or yellow curry paste
- 2 cups light coconut milk (canned)
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 cup cauliflower (chopped)
- 1 15 oz can chickpeas (rinsed and drained)



1. Heat a large pot or skillet over medium heat and spray with nonstick oil. Once hot add shallot, garlic, ginger and hot pepper. Sauté for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently.
2. Add curry paste (starting with the smallest suggested amount and adding more later if needed) and stir. Cook for 2 minutes more. Add coconut milk, turmeric, maple syrup, soy sauce and stir. Bring to a simmer over medium heat.
3. Once simmering, add cauliflower and chickpeas and slightly reduce heat
4. Cover and cook for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, to soften the cauliflower and chickpeas and infuse them with curry flavor. Keep at a simmer - lower heat if boiling.
5. Taste and adjust the flavor of the broth as needed, adding more curry paste if desired.
6. Serve as is, or over greens (fresh or cooked such as spinach), cauliflower rice or a whole grain.

#### Easy Shakshuka (adapted from [www.cookieandkate.com](http://www.cookieandkate.com))

Note: This Middle-eastern one-dish meal is great for brunch or a light dinner. It is very popular in Israel and features poached eggs in a hearty, spicy tomato and pepper sauce. Top it with feta cheese and fresh cilantro and parsley for extra flavor. Serve with crusty bread to sop up the sauce.

Nutrition information: Serves 6, Calories: 215, Carbs: 16 g, Protein: 11 g, Fat: 13 g

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
  - 1 large onion, chopped
  - 1 large red bell pepper, chopped
  - ¼ tsp salt
  - 3 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
  - 2 Tbsp tomato paste
  - 1 tsp ground cumin
  - ½ tsp smoked paprika
  - ¼ tsp red pepper flakes
  - 1 large can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes, preferably fire-roasted
  - 2 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley, plus extra for garnish
  - Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
  - 5 to 6 large eggs
  - ½ cup crumbled feta
1. Preheat the oven to 375°.
  2. Warm the oil in a large, oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Add onion, bell pepper, and salt. Cook, stirring often, until the onions are tender, about 4 to 6 minutes.
  3. Add the garlic, tomato paste, cumin, paprika and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring constantly, until nice and fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes.
  4. Pour in the crushed tomatoes and add the cilantro. Stir, and let the mixture come to a simmer. Reduce heat and cook gently for 5 minutes.



5. Turn off the heat. Add salt and pepper as desired. Use the back of a spoon to make a well near the perimeter and crack the egg directly into it. Gently spoon a bit of the tomato mixture over the whites to help contain the egg. Repeat with the remaining 4 to 5 eggs, depending on how many you can fit. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper over each egg.
6. Transfer the skillet to the oven and bake for 8 to 12 minutes. It's done when the egg whites are an opaque white and the yolks have risen a bit but are still soft. They should still jiggle in the centers when you shimmy the pan (and they'll continue cooking after you pull the dish out of the oven.)
7. Top with the crumbled feta, fresh cilantro leaves, and more red pepper flakes, if desired. Serve in bowls with crusty bread on the side.

### **Hummus**

Makes about 1.5 cups.

Nutrition information: Per 2 Tbsp: About 50 calories, 4 grams carb.

- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice (1 large lemon)
- 1/4 cup well-stirred tahini
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp salt (or to taste)
- 2 to 3 tablespoons water

In a food processor, begin by placing the tahini and lemon juice and process for a minute until the mixture turns in to a thick, whipped paste. Then add the garlic, chickpeas and spices blending for several minutes until it is very smooth. Check the mixture for consistency and then add 2-3 Tbsp cold, water while the processor is running to make the hummus more light and creamy.