

Top 10 must stock pantry staples and 5 go to meals!

It's 4:30 in the afternoon and you're just wrapping up another Zoom meeting! Your spouse, kids, roommate, or significant other walks in and asks the dreaded question "What's for Dinner?"

Decision fatigue is real – you start rolling through the questions – Take out again? What do we have in the house? Do you want to go to the grocery store? Nope!

You go to your fridge and realize - the bag of salad you bought last week is now turning to soup.

You are hungry for pasta – but don't have any sauce in the house.

Maybe it's the end of the month – the grocery budget has been spent – now what? The average fast-food meal is \$11.00 – multiply that a few times and it adds up.

Solution: Keep these 10 things stocked in your kitchen and you will always have a quick meal ready to go! Don't believe me? I've included 5 recipes to get you started!

10 Must-Stock Pantry Staples:

If you have a dietary requirement, find your favorite substitute for any of these.

Eggs. Eggs can be kept in your refrigerator for up to 5 weeks. They make a great meal by themselves and are very versatile. Hardboiled, Scrambled, Fried, Omelet, Frittata, Quiche – endless options! If you can't eat eggs – try an egg substitute.

Cheese. From a good old fashioned Grilled Cheese Sandwich to sprinkling it on anything from eggs to pasta to casseroles. A block or a bag of shredded cheese can always come in handy. It can be frozen (it may be crumbly when thawed – but you're going to melt it anyway).

Tortillas. Quesadillas anyone? It's like a grilled cheese without the butter or bread! You can fancy them up with veggies, meat, a can of green chili's or whatever you have in your fridge. Corn or flour, low fat or low carb – tortillas come in a variety of options

Rice/grain. Rice/Quinoa/Farrow/Barley – Whatever rice/grain you prefer – always have some on hand. Rice comes in many varieties -Instant, white, brown, long-grain, jasmine (my favorite). You can whip up a fried rice, make it sweet or savory.

Beans. Refried or kidney, black beans or garbanzo -whatever your favorite – choose to always have a few cans on hand. You can toss them into a quesadilla, onto a salad, into a soup, or even toss chickpeas in spices and bake to make a crunchy snack.

Onions/Garlic. I always have at least 1 onion in the house. You can add an onion to almost any savory dish or just sauté them in some butter and wine and throw them on top of anything else!

Minced garlic in a jar can live in your refrigerator for a very long time and makes it easy to throw in a spoonful to any sauce or savory dish.

Canned Chicken/ Tuna Nice to throw on a salad, make a tuna/chicken salad sandwich, shred on tostadas, in a quesadilla, or eat straight from the can (try not to meow!)

Pasta & sauce. There are many kinds of pasta – cutting down are carbs – try quinoa pasta or veggie pasta, need higher protein or fiber – there is a pasta for that too. Choose your shape and size or keep a variety stocked. It's also a great idea to have a few jars/cans of your favorite pasta sauce. You can always fix them up by adding in veggies, onion, garlic.

Frozen Veggies. Grab your favorites to have on hand. A bag of peas and carrots goes great with your fried rice (rice, eggs, veggies!) You can buy bags of frozen chopped onions and peppers to add to a base of anything! Frozen broccoli can be blended into pesto; hash brown potatoes can be tossed in soups, roasted, or mashed. You can always buy canned veggies too – just watch the salt content.

Frozen Pizza. This is always great to have on hand and there are healthy options. We love the Milton's cauliflower crust with roasted veggies. It is really good! It comes in a 2-pack at Costco!

Challenge – Look through your pantry/cupboards, freezer/ refrigerator – what can you eat for dinner this week? How many meals can you make before you have to go to the store?

Magic Meal Planner System: Looking for a way to save time each week going to the grocery store, save money by not wasting food you buy go bad, and avoid Decision Fatigue?

Try the Magic Meal Planning System. It will help you plan your meals for the week – create your shopping list to get you in and out of the store quickly and your entire family will know the answer to “What’s for dinner?”

Where to get it – www.magicmealplan.com – Officially Launching April 1, 2021.

Save \$10 using the code: Meals10

5 Go-To Meals You Can Make From Your Pantry.

These meals are simple to make on the fly. You can even get your family involved in some of the prep work!

- 1) **Black Jac Quesadillas /Omelets:** Perfect the basic quesadilla or omelet and you are only limited by your imagination. You can have plain cheese or add whatever you want to dress it up – black beans, frozen veggies, whatever seasonings you like.
- 2) **Chicken Fried Rice.** So easy you may never order Chinese again! Fantastic for using up leftover rice and veggies.
- 3) **Chicken Tortilla Bake.** Chicken. Cheese and green chilis are a classic comfort food!
- 4) **Black Bean Pasta Bowl** Great way to feed a hungry family on the go!
- 5) **Tuna Pasta Bake** This incredibly easy pasta bake uses most of everything you already have in your pantry!

BLACKJACK QUESADILLAS

INGREDIENTS

16 oz can black beans, rinsed and drained
4 oz jar/can green chilies
4 tortillas
8 oz shredded Monterey Jack cheese
½ Salsa of your choice
1 tsp oregano

DIRECTIONS

STEP ONE: Dump the beans into a bowl and mash. Stir in the chiles, salsa and oregano.

STEP TWO: Put a tortilla in a dry skillet over medium heat. Spread 1/2 of bean mixture onto tortilla. Top with 1/2 of the cheese. Top with Another tortilla. Press it together.

STEP THREE: Cook about 3 minutes per side or until golden.

STEP FOUR: Cut into 4 wedges. Repeat with remaining ingredients.

Tips: serve with more salsa and/or sour cream. You can also throw in some canned or frozen corn.

CHICKEN FRIED RICE

INGREDIENTS

3 cups cooked rice
1 can of chicken drained (or 1 chicken breast cooked and cut up)
10 oz package frozen mixed veggies
Garlic
1 egg
3 tsp oil (sesame oil is great, but whatever you have works)
3 Tablespoons Soy sauce or Tamari

DIRECTIONS

STEP ONE: cook the rice

STEP TWO: Whisk egg with 1 teaspoon oil in a small dish – set aside.

STEP THREE: Heat another teaspoon of oil in a large skillet or wok over high heat. Add the frozen veggies and stir fry until tender, 1-2 minutes, add the garlic and keep stirring. Be careful not to let the garlic burn.

STEP FOUR: Push veggies to the side of the pan and add the egg/oil mixture into the center and scramble.

STEP FIVE: Add the cooked chicken and rice to mixture and stir in to heat.

STEP SIX: Drizzle in Soy sauce/ Tamari. Toss to combine. Serve hot.

Notes:

- Use leftover rice. Cold leftover rice works great for fried rice, so don't toss extra cooked rice if you've got it from a meal during the week
- No chicken? No problem! This recipe is great when made with chopped shrimp, leftover steak, shredded pork, smoked rib meat, or chopped kielbasa. Or, go meatless and double up on the vegetables.
- Pump up the veggies. If you want to pump up the nutrition of this recipe even more, you can replace some of the white rice with cauliflower rice in a 1:1 ratio. Add it when sautéing the frozen vegetables.
- Gluten free? If you need to eat gluten free, be sure to use gluten free soy sauce, ie gluten free tamari. My favorite brand is San-J and I prefer their low-sodium variety.

CHICKEN TORTILLA BAKE:

INGREDIENTS

3 cups cooked shredded chicken (if using canned Chicken – 5 oz drained = ½ cup)

2- 4 oz cans green chilis

1 cup chicken broth (I always keep Better than Bullion in the fridge – you can make up whatever amount of broth you need with just hot water).

1 can cream of mushroom soup

1 can cream of chicken soup

1 small onion – finely chopped

12 corn tortillas

2 cups (8 oz) shredded cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

STEP ONE: In a large bowl, combine the chicken, chilies, broth, soups and onion. Set aside

STEP TWO: Layer half of the tortillas in a greased 13x 9 pan, cutting to fit as needed.

STEP THREE: Top with half of the chicken mixture and half of the cheese.

STEP Four: Repeat layers ending with cheese on top.

STEP FIVE: Bake, uncovered, at 350 for 30 minutes or until heated through.

Notes: This casserole freezes well. Just pull out of the freezer, thaw overnight and then reheat.

It's great to make this up to take to a friend or neighbor in need.

Substitute cooked ground beef / turkey for chicken

BLACK BEAN PASTA BOWL

INGREDIENTS

1-1/4 cups dry elbow macaroni, uncooked
1 can (15 oz each) Whole Black Beans, drained, rinsed
1 can (10 oz each) Ro*Tel® Original Diced Tomatoes & Green Chilies, undrained
1 cup Kernel Corn
3 tablespoons BBQ Sauce
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

STEP ONE: Cook macaroni according to package directions, omitting salt.
STEP TWO: Meanwhile, combine all remaining ingredients, except cheese, in large saucepan; simmer over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until hot, stirring occasionally.
STEP THREE: Stir cooked macaroni into bean mixture. Sprinkle with cheese.

Notes: The cheese can be stirred into the macaroni mixture, if desired.
Serve mixture unheated with the cheese diced when you don't want something hot. This makes it perfect for entertaining or a family picnic.

TUNA PASTA BAKE

This incredibly easy pasta bake uses most of everything you already have in your pantry!

Prep Time:10 mins Cook Time:35 mins Total Time:45 mins

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

2 cups dried pasta
1/2 medium onion, diced
3 cloves of garlic, minced
1 3/4 cup crushed tomatoes
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1/2 tablespoon Italian seasoning
Salt and pepper, to taste
15-21 ounces canned chunk tuna in olive oil, drained
1/2 cup whole milk mozzarella, shredded
1/4 cup parmesan cheese
Fresh basil, finely chopped for garnish

DIRECTIONS

STEP ONE: Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
STEP TWO: Bring a pot of water to a boil then cook pasta for half the amount of time the box says. It will finish cooking in the oven.

STEP THREE: In the meantime, heat a large (12-inch) cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. When the skillet is hot, add 1 tablespoon of olive oil then add the onion and garlic and cook until softened and fragrant, about 3-5 minutes.

STEP FOUR: Add the crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, and Italian seasoning, stir to incorporate. Season with salt and pepper. Remove skillet from heat.

STEP FIVE: Drain the pasta and add to the skillet. Toss to coat. Add the drained tuna but do not overly mix. Just gently toss so chunks remain intact, and it doesn't turn to shredded tuna where you can't see it at all in the dish.

STEP SIX: Sprinkle cheeses on top in an even layer then bake for 25 minutes, or until pasta is cooked through and mixture is bubbly, and cheese is melted.

STEP 7: Sprinkle fresh basil (OPTIONAL) on top, serve, and enjoy!

NOTES: If you feel that the sauce is too bitter (it truly depends on brand of tomato so it varies), you can add a bit of granulated sugar to the sauce.

There are a lot of varying cans of tuna, and they range between 5-7 ounces, hence the measurement for tuna is a range.

Magic Meal Planner System: Looking for a way to save time each week going to the grocery store, save money by not wasting food you buy go bad, and avoid Decision Fatigue?

Try the Magic Meal Planning System. It will help you plan your meals for the week – create your shopping list to get you in and out of the store quickly and your entire family will know the answer to “What’s for dinner?”

Where to get it – www.magicmealplan.com – Officially Launching April 2, 2021.

Save \$10 using the code: Meals10

About Mary Gaul:

As a Business Strategy & FOCUS Advisor, Mary Gaul uses her background and experience in marketing, communications, and operations, to help over 500 businesses find practical solutions and new ideas for growth and success.

Growing up in a large family and raising a family of her own while working full time, Mary has found ways to save time and money by planning meals. She created the Magic Meal Planner Pages and documented the system she has used for over 20 years to answer the question: “What’s for Dinner?”

Connect with her on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/success-magnified>

Schedule a FREE 30-minute FOCUS session: <https://calendly.com/successmagnified/30minfocus>