

This Week's DINNERS

\$70
OR LESS

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Day One

[Popeye Burgers](#) with [Homemade Hamburger Buns](#) and Veggie Dippers and [Ranch Dressing](#)

Day Two

[Alfredo Mac and Cheese](#), Steamed Veggies

Day Three

[Spicy Turkey and Egg Bake](#), Green Salad

Day Four

[Crockpot Enchiladas](#), Green Salad, [Mexican Rice](#),

Day Five

[Chicken, Bean, and Cheese Burritos](#), Fresh Fruit

Day Six

[Homemade Pizza](#) with [Last Minute Pizza Sauce](#), Veggie Dippers with [Ranch Dressing](#) - use up any leftovers from the week as pizza toppings.

Day Seven

[Thursday Night Soup](#) with leftover Hamburger Buns - use up excess meat, veg, or rice in the soup.

Plan #5: Easy Meals

We all want dinner to be easy, don't we? If that weren't the case, restaurants, disposable plates, and dishwashers never would have been invented. However, it takes extra money to make dinner easy — or a little planning.

Lucky for you, you can have the best of both worlds with my \$70 or Less Meal Plans. We've done the planning and the saving FOR you. This plan is based on easy-to-prepare meals; the grocery lists and make ahead tips make it a cinch.

Prep ahead.

I've taken some of the concepts behind a large freezer cooking day and applied them to a week's meals at home. You can do a lot of the prep work in advance. Spend an hour or two chopping, dicing, and baking — and reap the rewards all week long.



Cheats for Good Cheap Eats (aka creative substitutions)

In order to keep the overall grocery total low, we have often made some substitutions throughout the meal plans in order to trim costs.

For instance,

- While recipes featured in this plan may call for either sunflower or olive oil, we've tested this plan with olive oil only. In this way, if you only have the funds for one purchase, know that you can fudge a bit. Will the flavor be different? Of course, but you'll also spend less if you just can't spring for a bottle of two different kinds of oils.
- If it's cheaper, substitute ground turkey for the ground beef in the Popeye Burgers. They'll still be delicious.
- The hamburger bun recipe should make 12. Use the leftovers as bread on soup night.

We've tried to anticipate common cheats and short cuts you could make in order to trim costs.

Feel empowered to make creative substitutions in order to eat well, but spend less.

Many of the meals "build on one another" and share common ingredients. That is to say, you can bake double the rolls for burgers as well as a side to soup, or chop up a ton of veggies to use as dippers as well as to steam. Any leftover items will be made into soup or pizza near the end of the week. In this way, you'll reduce waste and save time and effort in the process.

Read the notes in this meal plan **CAREFULLY!** There are cheats that we've added to get the price point lower.

On healthy eating...

Each family has its own reasons for why they buy certain things: health, budget, taste. I can't predict what everyone will like. Make the tweaks that you prefer for what's on the plan.

For instance, at our house we use unbleached all-purpose flour as well as whole wheat flour and sometimes even designated bread flour. Your price will change based on what you use. You might prefer organic broccoli while someone else is just fine with conventional. I'm not dictating what kind *you* should use, but I've listed the most economical (generally speaking) option on the grocery list. Feel free to change this according to your preferences. Just know that your total expense may differ.

Keep calm and shop on.

You can buy these ingredients at any grocery store. Choose what store has the best prices available in your area.

However, all the ingredients (except for the yeast and potentially some spices) happen to be regularly available at Trader Joe's, a place that doesn't always have everything one might need in a given week. Yeast is a seasonal product for Joe, so you can find it only at the holidays. Readers have reported great success in finding these ingredients at Aldi as well.

You don't have to shop at Trader Joe's, but know that if that is one of your regular stops, you could get it (almost) all in one

place. I love Trader Joe's for its healthier bent and its guarantee against additives, GMO's, and other unnecessary junk. Additionally, Trader Joe's serves as a mid-range price point. The ingredients list was purchased for \$70 or less at Trader Joe's, so you should find comparable pricing elsewhere, particularly if you buy items on sale or shop at a store with regularly lower prices than Joe offers.

This week's plan is a little heavy on homemade spice mixes, so if you don't already have them on hand, you may need to spend a bit more than the target price.

Your mileage may vary

That said, we can't guarantee everything. Prices vary from day to day and from location to location, no matter where you shop. But, you should come in close to the target \$70. We've assigned target prices for the most expensive items.

We also assume that you have some basic pantry staples on hand, like salt, pepper, and basic spices. If you are stocking from scratch, your costs may be a little higher.

This Week's Recipes

You'll need to download or print these recipes to reference this week. It's always a good move to read them all first as well since many recipes serve more than 4 people:

[Popeye Burgers](#)

[Homemade Hamburger Buns](#)

[Ranch Dressing](#)

[Alfredo Mac and Cheese](#)

[Spicy Turkey and Egg Bake](#)

[Taco Seasoning Mix](#)

[Crockpot Enchiladas](#)

[Homemade Enchilada Sauce](#)

[Mexican Rice](#)

[Chicken, Bean, and Cheese Burritos](#)

[Basic Pizza Dough](#)

[Last-Minute Pizza Sauce](#)

[Jamie's Spice Mix](#)

[Thursday Night Soup](#)

This Week's Groceries

This is a grocery list for all ingredients needed for the week as well as notes for cutting costs and stretching ingredients.

Read through the list carefully to see what you already have on hand or what you might omit in order to accommodate a family preference or to trim costs further.

Dairy/deli section

- 4 cups shredded cheddar cheese (target price \$3.99/lb or less) - You will use this in the burritos and crockpot enchiladas. You can also use less to economize. If a block of cheese is cheaper, go for that and shred your own.
- 1 cup shredded pepper jack cheese (for egg bake - substitute cheddar if you prefer)
- 8 ounces shredded jack cheese (to mix with some mozzarella for pizza, you can use all mozzarella if you prefer)
- 1 pound mozzarella cheese (\$4.49/pound)
- 1 cup shredded Asiago, Romano, or Parmesan cheese
- 7 eggs (target price \$1 at \$1.99/doz)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- about 4 cups milk
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1/4 cup butter
- sour cream or Greek yogurt for serving with egg bake, optional

Produce

- 4 yellow or white onions (target price \$0.69 ea) for pot pie and soup. If these are sold by the piece, as they are at Trader Joe's, buy the largest you can find. I was able to buy one onion for \$0.69 that was as big as two regular onions! You can use any leftovers on pizza or in future recipes.
- 1 head garlic
- scallions (aka green onions), optional
- 3/4 cups chopped greens like spinach, kale, or chard plus extra greens to top burgers
- enough salad greens/lettuce for 2 nights
- tomatoes (for serving with burgers or chopped on salad)
- seasonal fruit (1 night)
- seasonal vegetables for steamed veggie side (1 night), salad toppings (1 night) and for veggie dippers (2 nights)
- lemon (target price \$0.39) - to use in Jamie's Spice Mix, but this can be omitted if you like.

Canned/dry goods

- one small can chopped green chiles (\$0.79)
- 16 ounces macaroni, shells or elbows (\$0.99/lb)
- two 15-ounce cans pinto beans (target price \$0.89)
- one jar of salsa verde - only 7 ounces is needed (\$1.99)
- 12 burrito-size tortillas (\$1.99)
- 12 corn tortillas (target price \$0.99)
- 1 slice bread for fresh breadcrumbs
- Enchilada sauce — if you don't want to make homemade

- 4 cups chicken broth for Mexican Rice
- up to 4 cups broth (beef, chicken or veg) for soup, or you can use water
- two 6-ounce cans tomato paste or one can paste and one small can of tomato sauce, for pizza sauce and soup (target price \$0.89/can)
- 8-ounce can tomato sauce for Mexican Rice (target price \$1.49 for large can)
- five-pound bag of flour (target price \$2.99 for unbleached all-purpose) - for thickening in the mac and cheese as well as in homemade hamburger buns and pizza dough. A bag typically has 16 cups of flour, so you should have a bit leftover. Some of the recipes may call for bread flour, whole wheat flour, etc. Just buy the cheaper all-purpose flour and use it all recipes. There may be slight texture differences, but they are negligible, especially if you're trying to stay under budget.
- 1-pound white rice (target price \$1.10 at \$3.29/3-pound bag)
- salsa of your choice, optional for egg bake

Meat department

A good target to shoot for is 1/4 pound of meat per person per meal.

- 2 pounds ground beef or turkey (target price \$2.99/pound)
- 2.5 pound bag frozen chicken tenders (target price \$2.79/pound) - you should be able to get the chicken for less at a regular grocery store. This is Trader Joe's lowest price. You will need the chicken for the burritos and enchiladas and then use the extra for the soup and pizza.

Regular pantry ingredients

We are making the assumption that you have some basic ingredients in your pantry and spice cupboard. If you don't have these items on hand, it may bump your price point over the allotted \$70. If you don't have the funds to stock the spice cupboard, see if you can find a store that allows you to buy small amounts at bulk pricing.

- nonstick cooking spray
- olive oil and sunflower (or other neutral) oil - If you can only afford one oil this week (prices vary widely on this) then use the olive oil for best flavor.
- yeast
- honey, sugar, or sucanat (for pizza dough and burger buns)
- salt - recipes may call for different kinds such as fine sea salt or kosher. Use what you prefer, knowing that you'll need a little less for recipes that call for kosher salt.
- freshly ground black pepper
- mayonnaise (1 cup for double batch of ranch dressing)
- condiments for burgers
- bay leaf
- dried thyme
- dried onion powder
- garlic powder
- cayenne pepper
- ground cumin
- ground chile powder
- dried oregano

- parsley flakes
- Jamie's Spice Mix contains onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, dried basil, dried oregano, fine sea salt, black pepper, celery seeds (optional), grated lemon zest, cayenne pepper. If you don't already have these items on hand, it may take you over \$70 to buy them. Trader Joe's 21 Seasoning Salute (\$1.99) is an economical alternative. Otherwise, create a custom seasoning blend with what ingredients you do have on hand.
- Taco Seasoning Mix contains oregano, salt, garlic powder, onion flakes, chili powder, and black pepper.
- vital wheat gluten - this can be added to homemade buns for better texture but is not available at Trader Joe's. Can be omitted.

This Week's Prep List

These are tasks you can do in advance to make the rest of the week easier. Please keep in mind that prepped food is generally good for up to 4 days, refrigerated. If you plan to store these items for longer, wrap them well for freezing.

The steps below are in order of how you will need things during this meal plan. So if you don't have time to do them all, just chip away at the list as needed. This list also includes any shortcuts and meal building you need to be aware of.

- Mix up the seasoning mixes: Taco Seasoning Mix and Jamie's Spice Mix. Jamie's Spice Mix is best stored in the freezer, but if you're not using fresh lemon zest, you can store it in the cupboard with the others.
- Prepare a batch of enchilada sauce. Freeze the extra for another time.
- Shred the cheeses for casseroles and pizza if you did not already buy them shredded.
- Chop the onions.
- Prepare a batch (or two) of the Ranch Dressing. You'll use this on salads and with veggie dippers throughout the week.
- Prepare salad greens and toppings for the week. Store in airtight containers in the fridge.
- Bake the Hamburger Buns. These are good at room temperature for a day or two. If you're baking far in advance of serving, freeze the rolls.
- Prepare the seasonal fruit for salads and side dishes.
- Cook all the chicken. Use some for burritos and crockpot enchiladas. Use the rest in the soup and as a pizza topping. It's good for four days, refrigerated. If you'll be storing it for longer, freeze the cooled meat in portioned containers.

- Prepare the pizza dough and freeze if making more than a day in advance. Freezing directions are included in the recipe instructions.
- Prepare the pizza sauce, cover, and refrigerate. This should stay good for up to a week in the refrigerator.

Other things you should note:

Day One:

It's burger night. You can prepare the Popeye burgers and bake the buns earlier in the day if that's easier. Mix up the ranch dressing if you haven't already. Be sure to freeze leftover hamburger buns for soup night at the end of the week.

Day Two:

Alfredo Mac and Cheese is super simple and make-ahead. You can even make a double batch and freeze the extra for another night. Make it the night before and store in the fridge if you like. The vegetables for steaming can be prepared the night before or morning of if you haven't prepped them already.

Day Three:

Spicy Turkey Egg Bake is another dish you can double and freeze. Just be sure to cool the turkey filling before adding the egg if you're going to make this in advance.

Day Four:

If you haven't already, cook the chicken for the Crockpot Enchiladas as well as tomorrow's burritos. If you have extra Mexican Rice, you can serve that with the burritos or stir it into the soup later in the week along with any leftover veggies and chicken.

Day Five:

These Chicken, Bean, and Cheese Burritos are super freezer-friendly, so if you're feeling particularly industrious, make extras to stash in the freezer.

Day Six:

It's time for pizza! In addition to your dough, sauce, and abundant cheese, you might have some other vegetables or leftover chicken to top four 12-inch pizzas. Freeze leftovers or eat them for lunch tomorrow. Serve veggies and ranch on the side.

Day Seven:

Soup is a great way to use up leftovers. The chicken, Mexican rice, taco seasoning, and veggies from earlier in the week will make a great addition to this meal. Serve the soup with leftover rolls.