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Smart Weekly Meal Preparation — Flexible Planning Checklist

A standalone, non-personalised checklist for planning shopping, preparation, storage and easy meal assembly with flexible, inclusive prompts and official UK food-safety checks.



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Chapter links and PDF bookmarks support navigation. Writing areas are for handwritten or separate notes, not interactive PDF forms.

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Flexible Planning Checklist

A practical, non-personalised planning tool

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This standalone checklist helps you plan shopping, preparation, storage and easy meal assembly for the week ahead. Use only the prompts that fit your household, budget, time, equipment and preferences. There is no target number of meals, ingredients or preparation sessions.

It is a planning aid, not nutrition advice. It does not tell you what, how much or when to eat. Follow product labels and any advice that already applies to you.

Food safety note: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) guidance cited here applies to England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) guidance is cited for Scotland. Use the label on the product as well as this checklist. [1](#)

1. Make a plan that fits this week

Choose a planning window that is realistic. It might be a full week, two workdays, or simply the next meal. A plan can be useful without being complete.

- ☐ I have chosen my planning window: _____
- ☐ I have checked the days when time, access to a kitchen or energy may be limited: _____
- ☐ I have chosen a scale that fits: no preparation / one item / a short session / a larger batch.
- ☐ I have noted foods, flavours, cultural preferences or dietary requirements that matter in this household: _____
- ☐ If an allergy or intolerance is relevant, I will check each product label and any precautionary wording when I buy or use it. I will not assume that a vegan label means a product is allergen-free. [4](#)
- ☐ I have chosen one fallback for a difficult day: a familiar option that needs little or no preparation.

Low-capacity options: Use a smaller shop, frozen or tinned ingredients, pre-prepared items, delivery or collection, a shared household task, or no batch preparation at all. Planning can mean putting one easy option in reach.

Disability and access-needs options: If disability or another access need affects preparation, choose ready-prepared or differently packaged food, delivery or collection, help from someone you choose, adaptive equipment, a smaller action or no preparation. No explanation or justification is needed.

2. Build a flexible shopping list

Start with what is already available. Choose ingredients you enjoy and can use in more than one way, if that is helpful. There is no required formula for a meal.

- ☐ I checked the fridge, freezer and cupboard before shopping.
- ☐ I noted food with a **use-by** date so it can be used, cooked or frozen in time. A use-by date concerns safety; a best-before date concerns quality. 4
- ☐ I have selected a few useful items for meals, packed lunches or snacks: _____
- ☐ I have chosen any cupboard, frozen or chilled standby items I would like available: _____
- ☐ My list is organised in the way I shop (for example, aisle, shop, delivery list or collection list).
- ☐ I have included the storage I will need before buying more food.

Illustrative assembly ideas — adapt or ignore:

- a grain, pasta, potato or bread item with an ingredient from the fridge, freezer or cupboard and a sauce or seasoning you like;
- a soup, salad, sandwich, wrap or baked potato using ingredients already on hand; or
- a portion of a previously cooked dish, stored and reheated safely.

These are examples of planning combinations, not a meal plan or nutrition prescription.

3. Put food safety into the plan

Set the storage plan before cooking. Keep a fridge between **0°C and 5°C** and a freezer at about **-18°C**; a thermometer is a useful way to check. 1

- ☐ I will follow storage and cooking instructions on each label.
- ☐ I will keep raw meat, poultry and fish in sealed packaging or clean sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge, away from other food. 1
- ☐ I will clean hands, surfaces, utensils and plates after they touch raw or thawing meat. 1

- ☐ I will cool cooked food, divide it into smaller portions if useful, and refrigerate it within one to two hours. 1
- ☐ I will label prepared or frozen food with what it is and the date: _____
- ☐ I will eat leftovers within two days or freeze them if I will not use them in time. 1
- ☐ I will defrost food in the fridge and follow its label instructions. 1
- ☐ For rice, and for previously cooked and frozen meat, I will follow the FSA's food-specific directions: reheat only once and make it steaming hot throughout. 3 For other foods, I will follow the product label and applicable FSA/FSS guidance.
- ☐ If I cook rice, I will use the FSA's specific advice: cool it quickly, ideally within one hour; keep it in the fridge for no more than one day before reheating; and heat it until steaming hot throughout. 3
- ☐ I will not rely on a smell test for food past a use-by date. 3

4. Choose one preparation step

Pick the smallest useful step. It can be done at the time that suits you, including around shift work, caring responsibilities or a changing week.

- ☐ Wash fruit and vegetables with water before eating them. 3
- ☐ Prepare one item now: _____
- ☐ Cook one dish or component that I want to use again: _____
- ☐ Portion and label it for the fridge or freezer: _____
- ☐ Prepare a container, bag or lunch box for a later meal: _____
- ☐ Stop here if this is enough for today.

A simple assembly prompt: When it is time to eat, choose from what you have stored, bought or prepared. Combine items in the way that works for you, then return any food that needs chilling promptly. If the plan no longer fits, use the fallback option rather than treating the plan as a rule.

5. Make the routine workable

A weekly reset does not have to happen on a particular day or last a set amount of time. Use a brief check when it helps.

- ☐ My next check-in will be: _____
- ☐ I will look first at food that needs using soon.
- ☐ I will decide whether to use, freeze, share within my household or leave an item for another plan.
- ☐ I will revise the list for next time without scoring the week.

For employers and managers: improve the conditions, not people's food choices

Meal preparation is personal. Do not require colleagues to use this checklist, disclose allergies, diet or food routines, or report personal data. Instead, consider practical work-design actions:

- ☐ Are breaks protected in practice, including for shift and customer-facing staff?
- ☐ Is there clean, usable access to water, storage, refrigeration or a place to eat where appropriate?
- ☐ Can people take a break without being expected to work through it?
- ☐ Can general feedback on facilities be gathered without asking for health, dietary or allergy information?

My one-week planning sheet

Planning window:

Food or items I would like to use first:

One shopping or collection action:

One preparation action, if I choose to do it:

Storage reminder (for example, label, use-by date, fridge or freezer):

Fallback for a low-time or low-energy day:

Final action plan

The next small action I will take is:

I will do it on or around:

A smaller version, if my week changes, is:

What I need to make that easier:

References

1. [Food Standards Agency: How to chill, freeze and defrost food safely](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-chill-freeze-and-defrost-food-safely/how-to-chill-freeze-and-defrost-food-safely)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-chill-freeze-and-defrost-food-safely/how-to-chill-freeze-and-defrost-food-safely>
2. [Food Standards Scotland: Chilling food](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumer-advice/food-safety/food-safety-in-the-kitchen/chilling)
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3. [Food Standards Agency: Home food fact checker](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-food-fact-checker/home-food-fact-checker)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-food-fact-checker/home-food-fact-checker>
4. [Understanding food labelling](https://www.gov.uk/understanding-food-labelling/print)
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