

#86 - The Lazy Genius Buys Meat

Hi, friends! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 86 and while a little odd in its title, it's a topic I've been asked about a lot. This is The Lazy Genius Buys Meat. Obviously this episode isn't relevant to vegetarians and vegans, and in case you did click the link, wondering if it was a tricky title somehow, let me reassure you that we're talking about buying meat today. I respect and honor the choice of folks who don't eat meat, and I want to offer resources to those of you who do. But we're going to talk literally about how to buy meat. Where you can get it, how you can save money, how you store it, and all the things.

Before we jump into that though, I'd love to invite you to join my mailing list! Giving up your email, knowing that you're going to get messages in an already-full inbox, is kind of the worst. I get it. But this Wednesday, our Lazy Genius email situation is about to change! I'm going to be sending a newsletter once a month (not once a week like I've been doing), and I'm hoping it's the kind of email you're so excited to see in your inbox. It'll have all the regular newsletter stuff like content you might have missed since a lot of you don't even know that I put posts and recipes on a blog sometimes, books I'm reading and podcasts I'm loving, as well as words from me that aren't put anywhere else. I used to send out an email like this in the early early days of LGC, but we've gotten away from it and I miss it. So if you're already on the email list, you might already know that we're shaking it up, and if you're not on my email list, I'd love for you to go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/join or click the link in your podcast app (you probably need to either swipe on the podcast logo or press the little i or something to see it). Our first monthly email will go out this Wednesday, December 5th, and I'm really excited about them, mostly because I think you'll be excited about them, too, and I love to make you happy. Are we in a very codependent relationship? No, we're very healthy. So again, thelazygeniuscollective.com/join or click the link in your app, and on Wednesday, you'll get a bright and shiny new email from me that will hopefully make your life easier and more fun.

Okay! Let's talk about buying meat, and here's the first thing I'm going to say. It's okay if you buy meat that isn't organic or grass-fed or free-range or from the happiest of cows and chickens. I think most of us want to buy the best meat we can but can't always make that happen for lots of reasons. I want to say upfront that you are allowed to buy whatever meat you need to. There is no judgment here. I think we all believe in taking care of our planet and everything in it, but most of us can't do it all at once. We can't buy organic produce and consciously-raised meat and never buy fast fashion clothes at Target again and only drive an electric car and never use plastic bags and all the things. It all matters and it's all helpful, but just know that it's okay if you can't always or just choose not to buy meat from consciously raised animals. That's a personal decision, and I leave everyone to make theirs with no judgment from me.

Now, it's hard to talk about buying meat without talking about your freezer situation. I have two fridges and freezers because I do. We buy a lot in bulk on sale, and I make a lot of freezer meals for a family of five, so a second freezer is super helpful to us. Ours was a handmedown freezer from my parents, but when it goes, we're buying another one. It is so worth the investment in the long run to be able to buy things, especially meat, on sale. But that's not a

possibility for everyone. Today we're going to talk about four different topics when it comes to buying meat - cost, consciousness, convenience, and storage. I couldn't think of a word for storage that started with a C, so there you go. It just worked out that way. Ooo, containment! Can we stretch to make containment work? Anyway, I'm going to do my very best to make sure that those of you with extra freezers and those with just the tiny one on the top half of your fridge can all benefit from this episode.

So first, let's talk about cost. There are three ways - I mean, there are a lot more than three ways - but there are three ways today that we're going to save money on meat. Number one, eat less meat. I know, right? But it's a real thing. The more meat you eat in a meal, the more money you have to spend on meat. So if saving money is a priority which I'm guessing it is, eat less meat. But there are several ways to do this. There's the obvious one of meals that have no meat. Meatless Mondays might be a thing for you. Just even considering one or two meals a week where there's no meat will save you tons. Let's do some real simple math because math is hard and I don't like it. Even the cheapest cuts of meat are going to be at least \$3-4 a pound. So let's say your family cuts out just one pound of meat a week. That's over \$200 a year in savings which might not seem like much or it might seem like a lot, but stuff adds up and making tiny cuts here and there can really help a tight budget. I mean, that's only one pound of such a cheap price on meat, and it's still over \$200 a year and close to twenty bucks a month. Okay, so one way to eat less is to have meals without meat. From our brainless crowdpleasers which, if you're new here, is something I talk about often when it comes to meal planning and lay out pretty specifically in the meal planning episode, but a couple of our meatless brainless crowdpleasers are grilled cheese and tomato soup, pasta that's just noodles and sauce like the cheese tortellini from Costco, and yakisoba noodles which is a kind of Japanese noodle and we just add vegetables to it. That's all from my list because we eat less meat in other ways rather than have a lot of specifically vegetarian meals, but we do have them. And that's one way to eat less meat. Another way is to use recipes that use meat but that stretch it so it's not a big steak or whole piece of chicken alongside vegetables. This is my preferred way of eating less meat is just eating less meat in every meal. We do a lot of one bowl meals which you can find on my site, but we'll cut up one steak and make steak stirfry. I made two dinners' worth of chicken tikka masala with just one pack of boneless skinless chicken thighs. Choose meals where you have meat but it's not the main attraction of dinner. A third way to eat less meat, especially if meat is the main attraction, is just to have smaller portions. Again, it adds up, so that's a fairly simple way to eat less. Cut pieces of chicken in half before you cook them. Cook a big steak but slice it after you grill it and serve up the slices so it's still a big part of the plate but it's not as big as the actual plate. And the last way to eat less meat is to choose when you want meat to be the star so you don't always feel like you're lacking. I hear you right now telling me that your husband is weird and wants a full plate with a big piece of meat and three sides for every dinner. My first reaction is that your husband is a grown man and can deal, and my second reaction is sure thing! There's nothing like a big steak and a baked potato and a side of some yummy green vegetable. It's not like you can never eat that meal again; just make it on purpose when you do. Maybe one meal a week has meat as the star and you lean into it. Other meals, not so much. So the first way to save money on meat is to eat less of it, and the four ways to eat less of it - skip it altogether once a week or so, stretch a piece of meat in a recipe, serve smaller portions, and make meat the star on purpose but less often.

The second way to save money on meat is to buy it on sale. I'm so smart, aren't I? This is very obvious, but let's approach it like a Lazy Genius because here's where you run into trouble. You buy anything that's marked down. You see those sale fliers and then those yellow discount

stickers and you just go nuts and throw it all in the freezer when you get home. But if you buy a pork shoulder and have no idea how to cook a pork shoulder or don't have any brainless crowdpleasers or anything on your dinner queue that uses pork shoulder, you just wasted money on a sale price pork shoulder. Don't buy meat just because it's on sale. Only buy meat that's on sale if you already use that cut of meat. That's where we get in trouble. So, yes, you know to buy meat on sale, but please limit those sale purchases to cuts of meat you're familiar with, that aren't gonna sit in your freezer for the next year because you're overwhelmed with just thawing the thing much less cooking it. So the inverse of that? Know what cuts of meat you use a lot and buy those on sale. Because let's say you don't have a lot of extra freezer space. If you buy a few pounds of chicken thighs that are on sale and you know that you use chicken thighs in several of your brainless crowdpleaser recipes, make a meal plan around chicken thighs. You'll just eat a lot of chicken this week, but you're saving money and you're making meals that you already understand. That chicken won't be wasted. And if you do have freezer space and you see a cut of meat that you use a lot on sale, snatch it. Grab it up, freeze it, and know that you're going to use it because it fits into your life.

So to save money on meat, eat less, buy it on sale, and the third way, pay attention to cost per pound. We get tricked that oh man this steak is half off! Instead of being sixteen dollars, it's only eight dollars and then we buy a couple. You're right; you just a great deal... on steak. The steak was \$16 a pound and you got it for \$8 a pound, but there's full price organic chicken right there at six dollars a pound. Ground beef is usually around \$3 a pound depending on where you shop and how premium it is. Don't assume that because is on sale that it's a good deal. It is compared to itself, but it might not be compared to the other options. So just pay attention to cost per pound. I'm not saying don't buy steak. Ohmygosh buy the steak! Just remember that if you're trying to save money, there might be something cheaper, even at full price.

Okay, let's move on from cost to consciousness. If you want to eat meat from humanely raised, farm raised animals, I applaud that decision. It's an investment of a decision because one of the biggest reasons most of us don't buy meat as consciously is because it's a lot more expensive. I get it. So when you make that choice, it's an investment. It might help to phrase it that way and see it through that lens. It's an investment maybe in actual local farmers in your area, in communicating to stores what the consumer wants - you know, the whole you vote with your dollars idea... it's an investment in what matters to you. We all have those in different areas, so if consciously raised animals is one of your areas, I have a couple of thoughts for you. And if consciously raised animals is not one of your areas, no shame, y'all. It's okay.

So there are three ways you can think about buying consciously without your wallet going up in flames. Number one, find a trusted local source. If you have the ability to buy your meat from a farmer, say at a farmers market or even at the actual farm, you'll get so much more knowledge about what you can do with the different cuts of meat. In my experience with farmers (and by the way, I have an episode about shopping at the farmers market if you're interested that'll be in the show notes), farmers are incredibly generous. They are so excited when somebody is excited about what they have poured their life into. I'm not saying that you establish a relationship with a farmer, with a trusted source, in order to get discounts on the meat, but it sometimes happens. If you're a regular with somebody and you ask questions and show curiosity in what that farmer offers, often they might round down a price for you, but more than that, you don't just get meat, you get a resource. If this is an investment you're making, you'll get way more dividends from knowing your farmer.

The second way to buy consciously without spending a million dollars is to choose less expensive cuts to offset the price. Maybe you're willing to spend up to ten dollars a pound on meat of any kind. If you go to Food Lion, that covers a lot of ground. Ten dollars a pound can get you a lot of cuts of meat. That's not always true when you're buying consciously, so consider choosing a cap, like a price cap, of what you're willing to spend, and recognize that your selection of cuts of meat will be more limited and that's okay. That's part of the investment and way that you can invest in this priority but still stay within a reasonable budget. And the third way is the first way of the last category which is just to eat less. You'll spend less if you choose to eat less. So if you're buying consciously, find a trusted source, choose less expensive cuts, and eat less.

The third category convenience. We've done cost, consciousness, and now convenience. How many times have we moaned that we forgot to pull meat out of the freezer or we feel like cooking meat is so much more of a chore than pasta or potatoes. Meat feels hard. It feels hard. So how can we make meat easier at dinner, even as early as when we buy it? First buy meat prepped. I highly recommend depending on almost-ready-to-go meats for at least a meal or two a week. It just makes things easier. Things like meatballs. I love Kirkland meatballs from Costco. I actually wrote a post about them a long time ago. I'll put it in the show notes. But they're already cooked, so you just have to microwave them straight from the freezer and they're great. And a giant bag which lasts us for a solid ten meals if not more is less than twenty dollars. Such a great investment in convenience. Target's meatballs are good, too. I've had those, and they're great. So meatballs, rotisserie chicken, frozen popcorn chicken or chicken fingers. Some stores sell fresh meat that's already marinated or skewered for kabobs or anything like that. Consider adding some prepped meat into your shopping and planning.

The second way to buy meat with ease in mind is to cook one protein a week and add it to everything. So you roast a couple of chickens and just use chicken in all your recipes. You make a big pork shoulder and use it all in your recipes that week. You grill a ton of chicken breasts and use them in your recipes all week. Things feel complicated when there are too many choices, so if you're pulling from a list of every possible cut of meat ever week in and week out, it'll feel overwhelming and not easy. So if ease is really important, pick one protein a week and have it ready.

And finally, and this one kind of dovetails into our containment category, and that is to freeze your meat in small and/or flat pieces. Let me explain. If you put a package of chicken breasts straight into the freezer from the store which I do and it's fine, but that package takes an enormous amount of time to thaw. I mean let's be honest, anything more than half an hour when you're trying to make dinner is an enormous amount of time. But if you take those chicken breasts and you cut them into bite-sized pieces, put them in a gallon freezer bag with a marinade, and freeze it flat, it will thaw in literally minutes in a sink of water or even under running water. The same thing is true even if you don't cut it up and marinate it. Take out those chicken breasts, go ahead and salt them if you want to change your life and make your chicken extra juicy, and then freeze them in a gallon freezer bag flat. Spread them out in the bag, and freeze it on a cookie sheet flat, and when it's time to thaw, there's way more surface area which makes it go so much faster. So if you want meat ease and you're dealing with the freezer, surface area is your friend. You can do that with ground meat even. Put it in a gallon bag and make it flat. Thawing is seriously so fast.

So for ease, buy it prepped, cook one protein a week, and/or freeze it flat. Our final category is containment or storage. This isn't really about tips as much as it is about perspective on how you use your freezer. You can freeze meat in three ways - one, freeze it whole from the store (preferably out of its package and flat for quicker thawing), two, freeze it marinated or prepped somehow like it's ready to just be cooked, or three, freeze it completely cooked. Pay attention to what's best for your way of cooking. Maybe you just haven't thought about it from this perspective, that it's not that you hate cooking and especially cooking meat but that you hate pulling whole packages of meat out of the freezer because you still have to make decisions about it. So now that you know that, consider not buying meat at the store unless you know that you have time that day to prep it and freeze it or completely cook it and freeze it. And when I say prep, I mean putting salt on it and then a jar or bottle of something: Italian dressing, a jar of green salsa, a bottle of teriyaki sauce. Don't complicate it.

If you currently use your freezer to store meat in marinades and prepped but don't like being hemmed in by meat that already has a sauce on it when it's time to cook, then now you know to stop freezing meat in marinades. Maybe that's not your story. Do what makes the most sense for how you cook and eat. We're not all the same, and that's lovely. So for containment, ask one simple question. How do you want to freeze your meat? Whole, prepped, or cooked? Of course you don't have to just do one, but know which one is your favorite and do that one the most.

So the four meat categories to think about: cost, consciousness, convenience, and containment. For cost, the broad strokes are eat less meat, buy it on sale, and think about cost per pound. For consciousness, your broad strokes are find a trusted source, choose less expensive cuts, and eat less. For convenience, buy it prepped, cook one protein a week, and freeze it flat. And containment, think about if you freeze your meat whole, prepped, or fully cooked.

And the last thing I'll say... don't be a freezer hoarder. I know we're talking about meat, but a lot of use our freezers primarily for meat and freezer meals. One of the biggest problems with having a huge freezer is that we never actually use them. We keep saving them for that extra busy night and don't want to use up our stash for just a regular Tuesday. But a regular Tuesday is exactly what your freezer is for. Use the meat you freeze whole or prepped or cooked. Please use it and reap the benefits of having it. Otherwise you'll have a fully stocked freezer but will still feel stressed because you're still cooking five meals a week or whatever. So don't be a freezer hoarder.

Alright, that's it for today, guys! Thanks for listening to this very December-appropriate episode about buying meat, but even when it's the holidays, we need to eat regular meals and buy meat. I hope this episode helps give you a more clear path in the grocery store. And don't forget that the new monthly newsletter will go out this Wednesday, December 5th, so please join the literal Lazy Genius Collective - be part of the collective - and go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/join or click the link in the show notes in your podcast app or at thelazygeniuscollective.com/lazy/meat. Alright, guys! Thanks for listening! I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Bye, guys