

# #97 - One Simple Step That Changes Meal Planning Forever

Hi there! 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 #97 - One Simple Step That Changes Meal Planning Forever. Is this magic? No, but this very simple, incredibly practical step kind of works like magic. I'll explain in just a second, but first, before you get distracted by a dirty diaper or a load of laundry and forget to finish this episode, I want to make sure you know that my favorite thing I've ever made for you - The Meal Plan: The Lazy Genius Guide to Happy Dinners at Home - is available now and will be available until Thursday, March 7th. After that, the doors close tight for at least six months. I'll mention it again at the end of the episode, but here's your quick reminder to not miss out on this incredibly helpful resource to help you meal plan in a way that makes sense for you. Most meal planning systems don't work because you didn't create the system; someone else did. I'm definitely not asking you to start from scratch in creating your system because who has time for that, but in The Meal Plan, I teach you the five pillars of Lazy Genius meal planning and how to order them in a way that makes sense for your schedule, your cooking skills, your picky eaters, and your love of the table. Most of us actually love the idea of the table, of gathering and sharing and eating, but we don't so much love the kitchen part. I believe that The Meal Plan can be the start of that love story, of where you start loving your kitchen as much as you love your table. So click the link in the episode info by tapping that little I icon in your podcast app, or you can go straight to the source - [store.thelazygeniuscollective.com/themealplan](https://store.thelazygeniuscollective.com/themealplan). Again, it's available until March 7th, but careful waiting. I always get emails after a deadline ends for folks that just forgot. Because there's a live teaching component to this system, we have to close the doors for real on March 7th. Plan accordingly, my friends.

Okay, so I mentioned a second ago that finding your rhythm is a Lazy Genius meal planner is built on five pillars, and we're going to talk about one of those pillars, possibly the most important one, today. Brainless Crowdpleasers. If you follow me on Instagram which I encourage you to do because I'm there a lot and talk about meal planning every Monday - I'm @thelazygenius - you've definitely heard me talk about Brainless Crowdpleasers. They are a pivotal part of my personal meal planning system, and if you are in a season of life where dinner feels like a chore rather than something fun you look forward to, I imagine you're going to really love this episode. Brainless Crowdpleasers are about to become your new best friend.

The one simple step that changes your meal planning forever is making a physical list of your personal Brainless Crowdpleasers. Actually write them down and hang the list on your fridge, put it in your planner or tucked into a favorite cookbook you open often. It needs to be somewhere you remember or even better can see immediately. You might think you don't need a list, that you mostly remember what would go on it. But when it's 4:30pm and you're scrambling to figure out dinner, you need all the help you can get. You need decisions already made. You need the thinking already done. A physical list will do more for you than you realize.

I've been talking about Brainless Crowdpleasers for awhile now, but in the last teaching session of The Meal Plan, a number of folks in our private Facebook group (which you can be part of as

part of The Meal Plan system by the way) said that one of the most transformational things they did was this simple step. Just write down the Brainless Crowdpleasers. It feels stupidly easy but makes a massive difference. Which, you guys, is exactly what we're shooting for in becoming a Lazy Genius! If dinner matters, becoming a genius about meal planning can help, but if you're a Lazy Genius, you can do one simple step to make a huge impact. Yes, please.

So let's define what a Brainless Crowdpleaser is. That's pretty vital if this list is going to change your life in big ways. A Brainless Crowdpleaser is any meal that requires very little brain power from you and is generally accepted by your people. Again, it's any meal that requires very little brain power from you and is generally accepted by your people. Let's go ahead and clear up a few spots of confusion.

First, brainless doesn't have to mean easy. It certainly can, but only you know what is required from your brain in order to make a meal. Maybe there's a recipe your grandmother taught you that has multiple steps, but you can basically do those steps in your sleep. It counts as brainless. And so does frozen pizza. It all counts so long as it's brainless for you.

One of our family Brainless Crowdpleasers, possibly the most popular one, is chicken tikka masala. Now, it's not super easy. It requires making ginger garlic paste, mixing up a garam masala spice blend. I have to have all the ingredients prepped and ready to go when I start cooking because the first ten minutes are super hands-on with a lot of smoke. But it's brainless for me. I know that ginger-garlic paste can keep for a couple of weeks, so I'll make up a batch when I have a few free minutes and some extra space in the dishwasher for my food processor bowl. I know that mixing up the spice blend in the morning will make the cooking that afternoon easier and don't really have to think about. I've already found the brainless rhythm of what looks like a fairly complicated recipe. It's probably not brainless for you because you've never made it. That's why it's so important to define this correctly. Brainless doesn't have to mean easy. It just has to mean brainless for you.

The next spot of confusion I've had with this term is the crowdpleaser part. First, crowd. I don't mean it is big enough to feed a crowd. I just mean it feeds your crowd. Your crowd can be just you, you and a partner, or you and your family of eight. Crowd just means the crowd regularly sitting around your table, no matter the number. And then the second half of that word - pleaser. Not everyone has to jump for joy. I don't throw a party when we have hot dogs and tater tots, but I'm generally happy with that dinner, so it counts as a pleasing me. That goes for your whole crowd. Some meals will elicit a variety of responses from your crowd, but as long as no one is having a panic attack or making you feel crazy because you just want to make dinner one time and have people not complain constantly, it counts as pleasing. Not everyone will be equally happy with every dinner, and that's okay. But Brainless Crowdpleasers generally please everyone around the table without requiring a lot of brain power from you.

And you already see why you need this list, right? You need this kind of meal in your life because by the time you get to the end of a lot of days, you don't have much left to give. If dinner was the morning and we had an entire day to recover from the emotional massacre of a new meal that didn't go over well, it wouldn't be so hard. But to end the day like that? To end the day working hard on a meal that is rejected, especially when you might already have some major insecurities about your cooking skills anyway? No thank you. You need Brainless Crowdpleasers in your life.

So now that you know what it is, make your list. Grab a piece of paper, and write them down. Everything from frozen pizza to a giant family cheese plate to chicken noodle soup to homemade chicken enchiladas you've been making since you were sixteen can go on that list. There are literally no rules here in terms of food; the only rule is how easy it is for you and how likely you'll be bet with nothing more than a dissatisfied grunt by that one kid who thinks the family should eat spaghetti very single night.

So make your list.

Now, for the rest of this episode, I want to talk about two things when it comes to your Brainless Crowdpleasers - how you build up your list and how you stock your kitchen based on your list.

First up, how do you build up your list? I've gotten DMs and emails from so many of you who only have two or three Brainless Crowdpleasers on the list. Maybe you have a toddler who literally will only eat macaroni and cheese. Maybe you're on an incredibly tight budget and don't feel like you have a lot of resources to get creative. There are many possibilities here, but here's a truth for everyone. You have at least one Brainless Crowdpleaser. Everyone has at least one. And guess what? Eat that meal once a week, and rejoice in the fact that you have one dinner a week where you're not struggling to cook it and your family isn't complaining about eating it. It all starts with one, and your singular goal in meal planning is to find one more. Just one. Then you'll have two! That's two days a week where you're not stressed about dinner!

Quick pep talk. You might think these meals are a copout, that they're throw-away meals that don't actually count, that you should be able to cook better or feed your family better or not struggle with this so much. This is zero percent true. You might feel very alone in this whole dinner thing, but you're not. So many of you feel this way, that you should have more than two or three meals that you repeat a lot, but I'm here to tell you that you're actually doing great. All that's left to do when you're in that headspace is to see your two or three repeated meals as a gift rather than some mark on your domestic record. If you're in a season of life where time or resources are tight, it's better to be a contented repetitive eater than a downtrodden cook. It just is. Your attitude toward yourself, your discontentment with who you are in the kitchen is only going to spill over to your table, affecting how your family interacts around the food. If you're discontent with making spaghetti again, it's likely you'll feel a little resentment for your kids who think it's the best thing ever. And they will probably feel it. I don't say that to guilt you; I say that to release you. It's okay to have spaghetti one or twice a week or even every night if that's what you need to do. I think about families generations ago who only had the food they grew or families during the Great Depression who were limited to just a handful of foods night after night. Yes, repetition might feel boring or frustrating, but it doesn't make you bad. It isn't reflective of who you are as a woman, as a cook, as a provider for your family. It just doesn't. So I want you to start reframing how you see these Brainless Crowdpleasers, especially the repetition of them. Use that repetition as a gift. See those repeated meals as a deep breath every few nights which will leave you with more margin to try something new on the other nights. Don't feel guilty about meals on the fly. Don't feel guilty about repetition. That's what this list is there for, to help you create margin in your life so that you slowly start to love your kitchen and find a rhythm of getting dinner on the table so you can have happy dinners at home more often than not.

Okay, pep talk over. So you build up your list one recipe at a time. Try a new recipe, pay attention to how it made you feel as the cook and how your family liked it. If they didn't complain

too much or maybe there was one element that just didn't go over well, like it was too spicy, try it again in a week but cut back on the spiciness. Try a new recipe, pay attention to how crowd pleasing it was and how you felt making it, and if you think it could eventually make the cut, repeat it until it does. Then start again with another new recipe.

Of course you can add more than one new recipe to the rotation at once to try out and add to your Brainless Crowdpleaser list, but don't feel badly if starting with one is all you can do. That's amazing, and you should be encouraged that you're doing it at all. If you have the capacity or cooking chops to play around with a few over a handful of weeks, go for it. But small steps count just as much, if not more, than big ones. One new test at a time.

And finally, let's talk briefly about stocking your kitchen. I did an entire episode about stocking your kitchen and mentioned this idea, so click the link in the show notes to listen to that episode in full, but essentially, stock your kitchen not with what the Internet says but what with your Brainless Crowdpleasers need. The purpose of a stocked kitchen is to be able to put meals together without having to go to the store, to make dinner essentially on the fly. If you're going to do that, you need to stock your kitchen with foods your Brainless Crowdpleasers require. So after you make your list, choose maybe three meals that are in top rotation, preferably recipes that use more shelf-stable products as opposed to a lot of fresh stuff, and make a list of the ingredients you need for those recipes. For example, one of my recipes I always have stuff for is a rice bowl with chicken and broccoli. I'm married to a Japanese man, so we always have rice. Like, I'm talking a thirty pound bag of Japanese rice at all times. It's pretty hilarious. I always have Trader Joe's mandarin chicken in the freezer along with a bag of frozen broccoli. That meal can be made with basically zero brain cells, and my family mostly eats it. My kids definitely complain about the broccoli because I guess kids just do that, but they'll eat one or two florets and devour the chicken and rice in different proportions, depending on the kid. I can always make that meal because I intentionally keep my kitchen stocked for it. You do the same. Pick a handful of your Brainless Crowdpleasers that can be made with non-fresh ingredients, and always keep ingredients for those meals.

And that is the one simple step that changes meal planning forever. Make a list of Brainless Crowdpleasers, keep it in view, and make those meals without guilt. No guilt. It's not allowed. You might know that I'm working on a book right now, and it takes a lot of time and also is depleting my brain in ways I didn't expect. Guess what? We are eating so many Brainless Crowdpleasers right now. We have what ends up being about a three or four week rotation of the same dinners, and that's great. I do have a list of about 25 Brainless Crowdpleasers, but I've been building that list for years. Don't feel weirded about by that number, but honestly, I think you'll be surprised and have more than you think you do. And then get excited because you just changed meal planning. Use those meals. Make them and enjoy them. That's what they're there for.

I mentioned at the start of the episode that you can join our community of Lazy Genius meal planners, and I want to make sure to mention that again. Brainless Crowdpleasers are only one of the five pillars of Lazy Genius meal planning, so if you're interested in learning the other four, in getting some sheets to print out for things like your Brainless Crowdpleaser list as well as a lot of other stuff, and if you want to join that private Facebook group that is made up only of folks who want to cook dinner this way, The Meal Plan is for you. Details can be found by clicking the link in the show notes, or you can go straight to [store.thelazygeniuscollective.com/themealplan](https://store.thelazygeniuscollective.com/themealplan).

And we close the community to new folks on March 7th, so please be sure you check it out before then.

And if you have any questions for me about this episode, I'll be live on Instagram this Thursday around 12:15pm EST to answer your questions. I'm there every Thursday and on Instagram Stories almost daily, so please follow me there @thelazygenius. Now go make your list of Brainless Crowdpleasers or just order The Meal Plan and print out the list already set up for you. I'm so excited to get more of you loving your kitchens again; it's basically my favorite thing.

Thanks so much for listening today, guys. I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. See you next week!