

## 300 - How to Lazy Genius Meal Prep

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, 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 300 - how to Lazy Genius meal prep! It's the beginning of February, and I think February has big "rut energy." Chances are, we've lost the sparkle of the winter holidays, we've definitely lost the sparkle of January freshness, and now it's just... February. February gets a bad rap because it's possibly the most boring month. Very little happens for a lot of us, and because we're so programmed to live a life of happenings, we can miss the loveliness that February affords, namely that it's usually calmer, ordinary, and regular. You still have stuff going on, but February is usually not a month with a lot of extras.

Which is why it can have "rut energy," especially around the table. Maybe you're already tired of soup. Maybe you had January goals to cook more at home or try new things, and you haven't experienced that the way you hoped. Maybe you're sick of eating the same ten meals over and over again, especially now when there's not as much busyness to break those meals up. Maybe you're having to tighten your budget after the holidays and don't have as much to spend on groceries, not to mention that the price of them is going up.

I would like us to put a positive spin on this ordinary, "rut energy" season, and I think one of the ways you can do that is through meal prep. Please do not turn off this episode. I promise you that I'm not going to make you do something you don't want to do. I just think you could be well served by even *thinking about* what meal prep could positively do for you in the kitchen. And if you find enjoyment and ease as you develop a tiny rhythm around it now, you'll be more equipped to experience its benefits when we transition into a busier season with different kinds of meals.

So today, I'm going to walk you through the right order to think about meal prepping. Not necessarily the order of what to do because what you do will be very different from what anyone else does, but the order of your decisions.

Now, before we jump into the step-by-step, it's important to define - maybe even redefine - a couple of things.

First, what is meal prep? At its core, meal prep is doing something to food so it's easier to cook or eat later. We make it grander than that, but really that's pretty much it. It's also an answer to The Magic Question - what can I do now to make something easier later? A way you can make eating and cooking easier later is moving your food further along the process of being ready.

Now I also want us to differentiate between food prep and meal prep. I'm not sure how many people throw these two terms around interchangeably and that's fine, but to help create a separation in your mind *and* to show you the importance of that separation, let's make them different. To me, meal prep is prepping meals, and food prep is prepping food. Clear as mud, right?

But think about it. If you wash a bunch of grapes, cut through various pieces of stem to create tiny bunches of grapes, and then put those back in the fridge for you or your kids to grab for a snack, that's food prep. That's prepping food to be eaten. It has nothing to do with a meal.

Meal prep involves foods that will for sure be used as part of a meal or maybe even the complete meal itself. Mixing a marinade, roasting vegetables ahead of time to just warm back up in the airfryer, making the soup early and reheating it later... those are all things I would consider meal prep.

Meal prep usually involves a plan of some kind. Food prep is just making the food easier to eat. Now here's one of the reasons the distinction is important. Let's say you slice up some bell peppers and put them in a container in the fridge. That could be food prep because you're just going to grab some pepper, dunk it in some ranch, and snack away. But you could also have sliced those peppers for a steak stir-fry tomorrow night, so they are intended for a meal. So sometimes it's good to distinguish what's meant for a meal and what's not.

The other big reason it's good to distinguish between food prep and meal prep is that it gives you broader permission to do this the way you need to. You might have groaned at the title of this episode because the thought of stacking up completed meals in containers for the week or filling your freezer with a dozen casseroles is just not your jam. Maybe energetically you just do not have it, or you could simply not have the freezer or fridge space to do that kind of thing. So you automatically write meal prep off because it's grander in your mind. Now, you meal prep one tiny thing and it still be meal prep, but the point here is that you might be a person who leans more toward food prep. The produce is washed and maybe cut somehow. You filled your snack basket with snacks for the kids for the week. You're preparing food to be eaten whenever it gets eaten. It's not attached to a meal or a meal plan because you don't operate that way. But maybe food prep could serve you well.

I would say most of us do a tiny combination of both. We probably don't do that consistently because food rhythms are harder to come by, but it's likely you'll have a little bit of both here and there.

So does all that make sense? There's a difference between meal prep and food prep, and depending on what matters to you and your life right now, one might serve you better than the other.

Next, let's walk through the steps.

### **We'll be right back...**

Okay, it's time to prep some food! I know I just told you there's a difference between food prep and meal prep, and there is. But for the rest of the episode, I'm going to generally classify what we're doing as meal prep. It's likely that food prep is quicker and more spontaneous than meal

prep and therefore might not require this same kind of thinking. It can, but just to keep myself from saying food *and* meal prep a million times or distinguishing between the two, we're going to generously call all of it meal prep for the rest of the episode.

Okay, step one: choose your time. If you were to spend a little time this week preparing food that you'll eat later, when would that be? When do you have the actual time and also the energy? Because you will be better served, at least initially if you're doing this for the first time, if you pay attention to your energy. If you're like, "Well, I have time after the kids go to bed," look me in the eye and tell me that you will honestly be even slightly motivated to cook a random pan of ground beef at eight at night instead of sit on the couch and read Sarah J. Maas. I mean, I'm probably picking Sarah. Now, can you be disciplined? Of course. Are you doing this every single night? Absolutely not that is the opposite of the point. The point is that we're batching; we're doing a lot of the same kinds of things - like chopping and sauteed and mixing and whatever else - at once so that you have more time to just be a person later. You don't have to be like a Jazzercise instructor and just love your time meal prepping, but pay attention to energy too, not just time.

When you choose your time, it can be two hours, and it can also be 15 minutes. The length of time doesn't matter, and a short amount of time doesn't mean it doesn't count. Anything counts because you're making something easier to eat or cook later. Whatever amount is still accomplishing the goal, so don't think you're not doing it right if it's not an entire morning or something. Anything counts.

It is also important that you start small here. Please don't choose your time based on the rest of the month or the year or your adult life. This is not a choice for all of eternity. This is not a choice for the next four weeks even. If you do not already have some kind of rhythm of preparing food so it's easier to cook and eat later, you will only set yourself up for frustration and failure in your own mind because you didn't follow through after week one. So just start with week one. This week only, is there a time where you'll likely have enough energy to meal prep a little? Cool. Just do that this week. That's it.

Step two: choose your scope. You choose your time first because if we started with scope or how much you're going to cook, you would choose too much. I have no doubt. It is vital - you hear me? - vital that you make your prep fit your time, not the other way around. If you're like, I have thirty minutes on Sunday after lunch and in your head you're planning on making four complete dinners, you'll quit. You'll quit mid pan of ground beef and your house will smell weird and you'll be mad me and it'll just be a whole thing. So name a realistic amount of time and then a realistic scope of what you'd like to cook during that.

Are you going to make one dinner? Maybe prep the protein for 2-3 dinners for the week? Are you doing this right around when you're already making a meal you're going to immediately eat so your counter could be a little more full than you realize? Just be realistic about the scope of this first meal prep endeavor, especially based on the time you have.

Step three is to choose your food. There are a couple of ways to approach this. Obviously you need to know what food or meals you're going to prep, right? That might require a meal plan for the next few days. So that could be your next step. Another way to see choosing your food is if you're going to go shopping for fresh groceries based on that plan and then prep, *or* you could do what I call Bizarro Food Prep where you take foods you already have, especially produce and proteins that need to be tended to right away, and do something to them. Roast limp green beans. Take that container of half a can of coconut milk and make a curry. Do what Quincy Wyatt did as our Lazy Genius of the Week two weeks ago and make soup from whatever random ingredients need eating based on the chart of ingredients from different cuisines in my book, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*.

This order, by the way, is also in that book, along with a million other orders of things. It's seriously a great book, y'all should get it.

So as you choose the food for your prep, are you choosing food based on predetermined meals or recipes? Will you need to shop? Are you only cooking the foods that need eating now? And your answer to this question will likely vary every single time you meal prep. It's all depends on what matters right now, what time you have, all the things. But after you have chosen your time and scope, namely the realistic parameters for this little project, what food do you need?

Step four is to choose your methods. Are you going to do mainly just food prep? Will you prep meals to completion or just elements of a meal? Will you use different appliances? Will you store in the fridge or the freezer or both? Basically you're looking at the meals that are coming or the food that you have and you're deciding what methods you will use to bring that food closer to being easier to eat or cook.

And this is where the planning stops and the action starts. The first four steps are planning. The next three are getting it done.

### **We'll be right back...**

Now this is where you start actually doing stuff. Step five is to choose your zones. Even if you're making just one thing, zones will be your best friend. A zone is just a designated area, right? Well, your kitchen loves zones, even small ones. Maybe even especially small ones.

Zones are great because they give you a visual demarcation of where something goes or what something is, *and* they make your kitchen feel tidier even though you have stuff out. For example, we have a Dirty Dishes Zone and a Fridge Zone. I've talked about these a lot, and they're also in *The Lazy Genius Kitchen* book, but these two zones are lifesavers for us. A Dirty Dishes is where dirty dishes always go. It's just a spot on the counter right over the dishwasher and next to the sink where we always put dirty dishes. You don't always have time to wash the dishes or load the dishwasher, but by quickly zoning the dishes that are on the table or other parts of the counter, you're clearing clutter from certain places and creating order in another. Dirty dishes are supposed to go in the Dirty Dishes Zone. That's literally their place. So even if

they're all out, it still feels purposeful because that's where they go. Plus, when it's time to wash or load them, they're already all right there. No hunting and gathering to find them.

We also love the Fridge Zone. This is a little spot on our counter in front of the refrigerator, and when I'm making lunches or dinners and I'm done with an ingredient that goes in the fridge, I'll put the ingredient in the fridge zone rather than opening and closing the door a few times or just leaving that thing scattered on the counter with everything else. By zoning it, it's out of the way of the task it's no longer useful for, and it's ready to be put away when things get put away. And my family understands both of these zones. They know if food is in the Fridge Zone that it can be put away. They know which counter to put their dirty dishes on. It's great.

So back to meal prep time. Having zones is huge for meal prep. You might want a Dirty Dishes Zone and a Fridge Zone. Depending on how intense your meal prepping is, you might want a chopping zone or a cooking zone by the oven where you also plug in your small appliances that you're using. You might want a cooling zone if you're cooking something fully and then freezing it. Or you might want a packaging zone where all your containers are. And those zones can be in your kitchen on the counter or at your table or wherever. But depending on your scope and your food and the methods you're using, you might want some zones. That also keeps people from tripping over each other trying to do two different tasks in one congested area.

Step six is to choose your order or your order of cooking. You're asking for trouble if you just start chopping or sauteing randomly. Is it trouble you can handle? Sure, especially if you're only doing a few things. But if you have plans to make more than a few things, it's good to know what order you're going in. A good rule of thumb is to start cooking the thing that takes the longest first so that you're not spending more time in the kitchen than you need to. Or if one thing isn't going to take a significant amount of time, think about the cooking style that will last the longest. For example, if you're going to roast a lot of vegetables, maybe a couple of rounds' worth, even though they take about as long as anything else, if the oven needs to preheat and it's going to be used for 90 minutes, get started on those tasks now. Get the oven going and cooking since it'll likely take the longest. Make sense?

In many circumstances, there's no right order for your meal prep. Most of you aren't going to go about this where it's a several hour affair. You're just roasting this and chopping that and maybe throwing a marinade together and calling it good. Order is relatively insignificant. But it's still a nice idea to decide your order just so you're not scrambling when it's time to go from one task to another.

But do remember this: no matter what order you choose, please make the last task to clean up. Including washing pans and wiping down counters as part of the meal prep process or you will be so sad. It's better to see that as part of the task rather than a separate thing that you'll hate doing.

And finally step seven is to choose your adventure. How do you want to make this fun? You can listen to a favorite podcast or audiobook. Blast great music. Do it with a friend and chat the

whole time. Turn on a favorite movie in the background that you can miss here and there when you're running water or whatever but can still enjoy. Make or buy a favorite beverage to enjoy while you're meal prepping. Make it fun, and you'll be more likely to do it again.

So those are the seven steps. And here's my suggestion if you want to take it. Go through the first four steps, the ones that have to do with making decisions. Just pretend like you're going to meal prep this week. See where you end up. And then decide if you want to actually do it. Does it feel worth it? Is your plan a lot simpler than you expected and you just might give it a shot? You could spend ten or fifteen minutes while you're sitting in the carpool line or waiting for a grocery pickup or something and just see. See how it feels once you make a handful of decisions. And then try it.

And if you decide that it's worth giving a shot, remember that every single week it can be different. One week, you just prep a little food. Another you make your lunches for the week. Another you cut up all the vegetables for all the dinners for the week. Another you make one dinner the night before. Another week you don't do anything at all. Remember that you should only be a genius about this or even about certain aspects of this if they matter to or if the result of them matters enough to do them. And as always, remember to match your expectations to the energy you're willing to give. Don't expect a freezer full of meals if you can barely muster up enough energy for 15 minutes. Fit the meal prep into the time you have, not the other way around.

We'll write out these steps and points in the next edition of Latest Lazy Listens, so if you'd like to start getting robust summaries and resources sent straight to your inbox because you always forget to check the show notes since you listen while you run or something, it's super simple! There is a link in the show notes to sign up, or you can go to [thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens](http://thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens). Just give us your email address, and you'll get this particular resource every other Friday.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! Today it's Laurie Helwig, and when I read this tip which has to do with meal prep, I said out loud to no one, "This is brilliant." Or I should have said "this is genius" if I wanted to stay on brand. Here's Laurie's tip. She writes, "I wanted to share a Decide Once that we're going to try implementing in our new season of life with a school aged kiddo! On Sunday nights I will make breakfast for dinner, and I'll make enough of some of the menu items - ham and cheese egg cups, oatmeal muffins, breakfast biscuits, etc. - to have some leftover for quick breakfasts before the bus comes (at 6:40am!) for the rest of the week. Thanks for inspiring this! One dinner plus five breakfast decisions done each week feels like such a big accomplishment. I appreciate you." I mean, right? Laurie, this is such a great idea. This is meal prep because Laurie is prepping the meal of breakfast, but she is batching like a boss by making breakfast once but for multiple meals. I also love implementing the other principle of Decide Once here. Sundays are breakfast for dinner. That's just what we do. And that those extras can be saved is just chef's kiss. Love this idea, Laurie, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

If you want to remember Laurie's tip, any of the seven steps or want to hear my favorite meal prep resource, don't forget to sign up for the Latest Lazy Listens email. It'll land in inboxes next Friday. Also if you could really use some help across the board in figuring these kinds of things out in your kitchen on the whole, check out my book, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*. It's a fantastic resource to help you think through the parts and processes in your kitchen that matter to you. Plus it's pretty and full of so many references and resources. You'll love it.

Okay, that's it for today! Thanks so much for listening, y'all, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!