

# Cook Smarter, Not Harder: Nine Time-Saving Cooking Tips – Ask an Expert

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Meal preparation takes time, and it can be overwhelming on busy days. Consider these nine time-saving kitchen hacks, and say goodbye to kitchen stress and hello to more quality time at the table!

## 1. Prepare staple items (chicken, rice, beans, etc.) once a week.

It doesn't take much longer to prepare extra. Brown rice takes 45-50 minutes to cook, which can be time-consuming if you do it several times a week. Prepare staple items in bulk, and add more time to your evenings.

## 2. Cook once, eat twice.

This [easy shredded chicken recipe](#) is perfect for cooking once and eating twice – or more! In 4-5 hours in the crock pot, you will have tender chicken for salads, burritos, tacos, sandwiches, and more.

## 3. Pre-cut fruits and vegetables.

This will give you easy add-ins to stir-fry recipes and side dishes. If you pre-chop produce once a week, it will make it easy to grab a handful and add it to your meals.

## 4. Freeze it.

If you're going to make a meal, make a double recipe. You can eat one meal now, and freeze the other one to eat later.

## 5. Keep your pantry stocked.

Include food items you can add to recipes or supplements on the side to make a [MyPlate](#) (five food groups) meal. If your meal isn't as well-rounded as you'd like, having a stocked pantry can make it easy to add something to the side or extend the food in a meal. For example, add black beans to your taco meat. You'll use less meat and fill up on beans, which are generally less expensive and a great lean protein source!

## 6. Improve your cooking skills.

If you invest time learning to cook in different ways, you will readily know how to make a quick meal. You'll also be able to cut down on prep time as you hone your skills.

## 7. Use leftovers as “planned overs.”

Leftovers aren't always very enticing, but they can be more appealing if you have a purpose for the extra food. Leftover baked potatoes can become hash browns. Leftover roast beef can become a roast beef sandwich. Leftover taco filling can be used to top a salad. In general, leftovers should be kept in the refrigerator for no more than 3-4 days, or they should be frozen for later use.

## 8. Keep a list of “go-to-meals.”

Keep the ingredients on hand to make mealtime a breeze, even on crazy days. Easy go-to meals might include chicken fajitas, spaghetti, and breakfast for dinner. Include your family's favorites in the rotation.

## 9. Keep a clean and organized kitchen.

Have you ever tried to find a recipe or cooking utensil to no avail? If you keep your kitchen and equipment organized, you can immediately start cooking rather than spending time searching for what you need.

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