

## COOKING WITH PANTRY STAPLES

First, some nutrition basics. There are 5 food groups: Protein (meat/meat substitutes), dairy, grains, fruits, and veggies. Ideally, a balanced meal is composed of 3 of the 5 food groups, one of them being from the Protein or Dairy groups and 1 of them being a fruit or veggie.

Hopefully, when you stocked up (or replace items) you are including items from each of these groups. Let's start there.

Step 1: Choose your meal's 3 food groups.

I recommend starting with the protein first, and building around it.

Next choose your sides or meal components.

See attached handout for combination ideas

Step 2: Choose your "flavor theme"

This determines your spices and seasoning. And if you don't feel particularly creative, use your favorite dressing or spice blend as a starting point.

Mediterranean: basil, oregano, parsley, garlic, crushed red chili flakes, bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, balsamic vinegar,

Asian: ginger, garlic, turmeric, curry, clove, 5 spice, soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, sriracha sauce

Southwestern: garlic, black pepper, chili powder, cayenne, cumin, turmeric, basil, thyme, salsa

Still not sure what to pick? Black pepper and garlic powder are a great starting point and provide a blank canvas to add a pre-made sauce or marinade later while eating.

### Step 3: choose your cooking method

Are you in the mood for a one pot meal (less clean up) – then choose soup/stew recipe that can be made ahead of time in crock pot or in dutch oven. Sheet pan meals are quick, low fat and quick clean up also. Line the sheet pan with foil, and even quicker! Tip – make sure to cut food in uniform sizes and if some items require longer cooking times, put them in oven first and then add remaining ingredients onto pan, as needed.

### General Tips:

- If you have fresh proteins, use those first, and if they are near their sell-by date, freeze for future use.
- Prep once, cook once or twice, & eat multiple times!

If you are cleaning chicken, clean two packs or a “family” pack, and season them differently. Either put it in fridge to be cooked in next few days, or cook in different methods simultaneously - bake in the oven, sauté a stir fry, and start a crock pot all at once!

- Have some veggies that are starting to be beyond their peak freshness? Throw them in a pot to make a veggie soup/stew, and use a low sodium or no salt added stock or broth as the base. You can then freeze in small quantities and thaw to protein later for a quick meal.

# Pantry Staples to Stock Up on (or refill) per Your RD

## Beans

Canned or dried beans are an excellent shelf-stable, plant-based protein source that pack plenty of fiber and B vitamins. When buying canned, choose low sodium or no salt added varieties (if not available, drain and rinse your beans which reduces the sodium by up to 30%). Stuck on what to do with your beans?

- add to soups and stews (any kind!)
- in pastas (especially fava, cannellini beans)
- rice dishes – black beans, kidney beans, red beans
- Toss on your salad for a plant protein meal
- Roast chickpeas or edamame for a crunchy snack or salad topper
- Puree beans into dips for a snack (black, chickpeas, white beans)

## Alternative Milks

We are a traditional dairy household, however, in times that I run out and my sons want cereal, I always keep a shelf-stable milk on hand. I prefer soy milk, but oat milk and fortified almond milks are good choices as well. Check the labels and choose shelf-stable milk that do not have added sugars.

## Oats

Of course oats are great for breakfast, cooked traditionally or made as overnight oats. A trendy and easy oat idea is savory oat recipes, as a meal or a side. Try a savory breakfast bowl with avocado, tomato, bacon (just a little!) & topped with a fried egg; make a fun brunch option with kale, edamame, and ginger; or try adding to your breadcrumb mixture when “breading” chicken

## **Whole Grains**

Or better known as our favorite food group—carbs! Whole grains create the bulk of our meals and also help to keep us full and satisfied. Choose grains that have >3g fiber per serving. Rice, pasta, lentils, tortillas/wraps, breads - all great staples. If you bought extra bread/wraps—freeze for later use.

## **Nuts & Seeds**

Nuts are a great easy & quick snack and full of protein, fiber and healthy fats. Add seeds, like flax seeds and chia seeds, to yogurts, oats, cereal or salads.

## **Something sweet**

A little sweetness is needed—especially now! So grab your favorite chocolate and keep it in the pantry, but choose wisely. 70% or greater dark chocolate offers antioxidants and minerals, but it is usually also high in fat, which makes it a very calorie-dense food. Limit to 1-2oz serving.

## **Olive Oil**

Olive oil is full of heart healthy fats and is a very versatile oil - cook pasta, fish, and veggies. Be mindful of portion and try to limit to 1Tbs per 2 servings, 1 Tbs is @100 calories and that adds up quickly. Choose olive oils that are in bottles made from dark glass or metal, and keep it away from heat to help it last longer.

## **Vegetable and/or chicken Stock**

This adds tons of rich umami flavor to one-pot meals and soups. Try to buy varieties with no added salt, that way you are in control of the seasoning.

## **Canned Tomatoes**

Crushed, diced, sauce, or pureed – canned tomatoes are a great start for many meals. Make your own marinara, minestrone soup/stew, chili,

## **Canned fish and chicken**

For a quick protein option (or if you run out of fresh meats/fish) canned tuna and chicken are great options to keep in your pantry. An easy go-to, of course, is tuna and chicken salad, but it also can be used in a rice or pasta dish, casserole, or tossed into a salad.

## **Canned Veggies and fruits**

once deemed an unideal option, canned fruits and veggies are a great option to supplement your meals, as long as you read the labels. Choose veggies that have no salt added or low sodium - I regularly stock up on canned green beans, artichoke hearts, beets, and corn. Choose fruits with no added sugar or natural (\*\*look at ingredient list, as this also may mean sugar substitutes are added) – applesauce, canned peaches, mandarin oranges - choose what your family loves!