

A top-down view of various healthy food items arranged on a light grey surface. At the top, a white rectangular plate holds several slices of a golden-brown baguette. To the right, a white bowl is filled with a light-colored soup or salad, topped with green onions. Below the bread, a white rectangular plate features several rolled-up sandwiches or burritos, filled with meat, cheese, and vegetables. To the left of the sandwiches, a small cluster of dark red cherries is visible. In the bottom right corner, a white plate contains a variety of fresh vegetables: green celery sticks, orange carrot sticks, and red apple slices. A small white bowl of a brown, creamy dip sits near the center-right. The entire image is framed by a thin orange border, and a semi-transparent orange rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the title and subtitle text.

BUDGET MEAL PLAN

one week of healthy
homemade meals

Tiffany Terczak

ONE WEEK BUDGET MEAL PLAN 3

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- 100% real food recipes that are simple, straight-forward and family-friendly.
- Recipes that are quick to make, and all of them can be made in under an hour.
- A few store-bought items for things I typically make from scratch (like hamburger buns and spaghetti sauce). Feel free to make these things from scratch if you prefer.
- A plan that comes in under \$50 for a family of four!

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:

- Spices, oils and vinegar. None of these recipes call for enormous amounts of these things, and you probably already have these cooking staples.
- Flour. Ordinarily I'd include this, especially if we were doing a lot of baking. But this week, we're skipping the baking and you only need a couple tablespoons for the meatballs. Most pantries have some sort of flour, but if you don't, I'd ask a neighbor!
- Precautions for food allergies. My family is blessed to not have food allergies, so I don't plan for them in my meal plans. However, ALDI has a fantastic gluten-free line of foods, and if you're dairy free you're used to subbing anyway. With a few tweaks, I think this ALDI meal plan would work in most food allergy families too.

NO BREAKFAST OR LUNCHES?

This meal plan doesn't include breakfast or lunches because in my experience, the majority of families have personal preferences on what they eat for breakfast and lunch.

- Have no fear though – I have NO DOUBT the ingredients you buy for this meal plan will provide extras you can use to cover breakfasts and/or lunches. Here's why:
- Every meal on this menu is something I make frequently with my family. Every single one of them covers dinner for the four of us AND enough for at least one leftover lunch (usually two).
- If you still don't think this is enough food to cover breakfast AND lunches, buy a bag of apples and a container of oatmeal. Make apple cinnamon oatmeal for breakfast and you'll keep your bill under \$53. 😊

Day 1

Best Burgers // Potato Wedges // Side Salad // Ranch Dressing

Day 2

Spaghetti & Meatballs // Side Salad // Ranch Dressing

Day 3

Southwestern Salad with Chicken

Day 4

Tortilla Soup

Day 5

Chicken Fried Rice

Day 6

Potato Nachos // Spinach Salad

Day 7

BLT's + Veggie Sticks

SHOPPING LIST

Cold Case

butter	3 tbsp	milk (dairy or non-dairy)	1 tsp
cheddar cheese (optional)	1 cup	Parmesan	2 oz
egg	3	Parmesan (optional)	1 oz
		sharp cheddar cheese	4 oz
milk	1 tsp		

Frozen

frozen mixed vegetables (peas, carrots, corn, etc)	2 cups
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Meat

bacon	0.50 lb	ground beef	2 lb
chicken breast	1 lb		

Pantry

Bread*	8 sliced	Mayo*	2 cups + 4 tbsp
Broth* or water	2 quarts	mustard (optional)	0.25 cup
can black beans*	1 (15 oz)	olive oil	3 tsp + 5 tbsp
can corn	1 (15 oz)	pickles (optional)	1 cup
		powdered beef bouillon	0.33 cup
can diced tomatoes	2 (15 oz)		
can garbanzo beans*	3 (15 oz)	red wine vinegar	2 tbsp
chile verde salsa c	1 cup	soy sauce or aminos	2 tbsp
coconut cream	2 tbsp	spaghetti noodles	16 oz
coconut oil	2 tbsp	sugar (optional)	0.25 tsp
flour	2 tbsp	sunflower seeds	0.25 cup
hamburger buns*	4	tomato basil sauce*	24 oz
ketchup (optional)	0.50 cup	white rice	2 cups

Produce

avocado	1	lettuce	1 head
bell pepper (any)	2	iceberg lettuce	2 heads
carrot	4.5	onion	2
celery	5 ribs	red onion	0.25
cherry tomatoes	2 pt	Roma tomato	1
cilantro	0.50 bunch	russet potato	4 + 3 lb
corn	1 cup	shredded carrots	5 oz
cucumber	3.25	spinach	4 cups
garlic	8 cloves	spinach or kale	1 cup
grape tomatoes	0.25 pt	tomato	2
green leaf lettuce	1 head		

Spices

chili powder	0.50 tsp	Italian seasoning	1 tsp
cumin	1 tsp	onion powder	4 tsp
dill	2 tsp	oregano	1 tsp
dried basil	3 tsp	paprika (optional)	0.25 tsp
dried parsley	4 tbsp	pepper	1.50 tsp
dry minced onion	0.75 cup + 10 tbsp	pepper (optional)	0.50 tsp
garlic powder	2 tbsp + 1.5 tsp	salt	11.75 tsp
garlic powder (optional)	1 tsp	salt (optional)	1 tsp
ginger	1 tbsp	taco seasoning*	2 tbsp
ground celery seed	0.50 tsp	thyme	2 tsp

** These ingredients can be made from scratch to help reduce costs. Recipes are at the end of this meal plan but the ingredients are NOT on the shopping list.*

DAY 1

Hamburgers

Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp butter

DRY ONION SOUP MIX

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dry minced onion
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup powdered beef bouillon
- 4 tsp onion powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground celery seed
- 1 tsp garlic powder (optional)
- 1 tsp salt (optional) if beef bouillon doesn't have any
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp pepper (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp sugar (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp paprika (optional)

TOPPINGS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ head iceberg lettuce
- 1 Roma tomato
- $\frac{1}{4}$ red onion
- 4 hamburger buns**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ketchup (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mustard (optional)
- 1 cup pickles (optional)

Instructions

1. In a large bowl, combine the ground beef and dry seasoning. Add optional butter and olive oil and mix together with your hands until well combined.
2. Note: You can use a stand mixer to mix the ingredients, but take care to not overmix. This will result in a tough and chewy burger.
3. Divide the ground beef into either 3 or 4 equal pieces and form each piece into a patty.
4. Preheat your grill or cast iron skillet and let it cook undisturbed for 4 minutes. Carefully flip once and let the burger cook on the other side for another 3-5 minutes, or until the burger reached desired doneness.
5. Remove to a plate and allow to sit undisturbed for 5 minutes. This lets the juices redistribute among the burger.
6. Top as desired and serve on buns.

*** This ingredient can be made from scratch to save money. Feel free to use the recipe we've included at the end of this meal plan.*

Potato Wedges

Ingredients

- 4 russet potatoes
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ - 1 tsp pepper
- ½ - 1 tsp Italian seasoning

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400F
2. Scrub potatoes and thoroughly dry.
3. Cut the potatoes lengthwise, the skinny way. Placing half of the potato cut side down on the cutting board, cut it in half, and then each half in half. Repeat with the other portion of potato. Each potato should yield 8 wedges.
4. Combine cut potatoes and olive oil in a large bowl and toss well to ensure all the potatoes are thoroughly covered in oil, yet not drenched.
5. Place them on a cooked sheet, skin side down, and sprinkle liberally with salt, pepper and Italian seasoning.
6. Bake in the oven for 25-35 minutes, until the tops and sides begin to brown nicely.

Side Salad

Ingredients

- 1 head green leaf lettuce
- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 2 cucumbers sliced
- 2 pints cherry tomatoes halved
- Ranch Dressing (see recipe below)

Instructions

1. Cut lettuce into bite sized pieces and add to a large salad bowl.
2. Slice cucumber and tomatoes, if desired, and add to salad bowl.
3. Serve with ranch dressing.

**** Reserve half the salad to serve with Day 2: Spaghetti & Meatballs*

Ranch Dressing

Ingredients

- 5 Tbsp dry minced onion
- 2 Tbsp dried parsley
- 1 Tbsp garlic powder
- 4 tsp salt
- 1 tsp dill
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 2 cups mayo
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 3 Tbsp coconut cream
- 6 tsp milk (dairy or non dairy)

Instructions

1. In a small jar or bowl, combine dry ranch ingredients. Shake well to combine.
2. In a large jar or small bowl, add 4 Tbsp dry ranch mix, mayo, red wine vinegar, coconut cream, and 2 tsp milk. Stir. Add more milk as needed to thin.
3. Drizzle dressing over salad and mix well.

This is a 2x batch of dressing. Serve today, Day 2, Day 3, & Day 6.

DAY 2

Spaghetti & Meatballs // Side Salad + Ranch Dressing

Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 1 ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp oregano
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 cup spinach or kale loosely packed
- 1 egg
- 2 Tbsp flour (I used all-purpose and whole wheat)
- 2 oz Parmesan shredded (using the rind, if possible)
- 16 oz spaghetti noodles
- 4 cups water
- 24 oz tomato basil sauce **
- 1 oz Parmesan (optional) grated

Instructions

Meatballs:

1. Preheat the oven to 375F and line a cookie sheet with a silicone mat.
2. Chop the greens as finely as possible.
3. Add all the ingredients to the bowl of a stand mixer and using the paddle attachment, mix until all everything is evenly distributed and mixed well. Alternatively, combine the ingredients in a large bowl and mix using your hands or a wooden spoon.
4. Use a cookie scoop to evenly portion the meat mixture into balls and place the balls on the prepared cookie sheet. Gently roll each ball in your hand for about 5 seconds, just to create a uniform ball shape and so that the meatballs retain their shape after cooking.
5. Bake for 15 minutes.

Spaghetti:

1. Turn a burner to high while you fill a pot with 4 cups of water. Cover askew.
2. When the water boils, break spaghetti in half over the pot and add noodles. Set a timer for 9 minutes to cook until al dente. Drain in a colander.
3. Heat tomato sauce in the saucepan and add drained spaghetti to the heated sauce. Stir. Top with shredded parmesan if desired.

*** This ingredient can be made from scratch to save money.*

**** Serve with reserved side salad.*

DAY 3

Southwestern Salad with Chicken

Ingredients

- 1 lb chicken breast
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 head lettuce
- 1 (15 oz) can garbanzo beans**
- 1 cup corn (preferably fresh, but thawed if frozen)
- 1 tomato
- 4 oz sharp cheddar cheese shredded
- 1 avocado
- ½ bunch cilantro
- Reserved ranch dressing

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 425F.
2. Place chicken breasts on a baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt. Place in the oven and set a timer for 25 minutes.
3. When chicken is cooked through (reaches an internal temp of 165F), remove chicken and let rest about 5 minutes. Shred with two forks.
4. Divide shredded chicken into three portions. Serve 1/3 on top of the Southwestern Salad and reserve 1/3 for Chicken Fried Rice and 1/3 for Potato Nachos.
5. Wash lettuce. Tear or chop lettuce into 1-2-inch pieces and place into a large bowl.
6. Add remaining ingredients.
7. Serve with reserved ranch dressing.

*** This ingredient can be made from scratch to save money. Feel free to use the recipe we've included at the end of this meal plan.*

DAY 4

Tortilla Soup

Ingredients

- 6 cloves garlic finely chopped
- 1 onion chopped
- 2 carrot chopped
- 2-3 celery chopped
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 (15 oz) can black beans**
- 1 (15 oz) can garbanzo beans**
- 1 (15 oz) can corn
- 2 (15 oz) can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup chile verde salsa
- 2 quarts broth** or water
- 2 Tbsp taco seasoning**
- 1 tsp cumin
- ½ tsp chili powder

Instructions

1. In a large pot, sauté garlic, onion, carrots and celery with olive oil and butter until onions become translucent.
2. Add remaining ingredients and simmer for at least 25 minutes. A longer simmer will create a more flavorful soup.

SLOW COOKER INSTRUCTIONS

3. Simply combine all the ingredients and turn the heat to medium-low and let it cook all day.

*** This ingredient can be made from scratch to save money. Feel free to use the recipe we've included at the end of this meal plan.*

MEAL 5

Chicken Fried Rice

Ingredients

- 2 cups white rice
- 2 cups water
- 2 Tbsp coconut oil
- 2 egg
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 Tbsp ginger
- ½ cup celery
- 2 cups frozen mixed vegetables (peas, carrots, corn, etc)
- ½ cup bell pepper (any)
- ½ cup onion
- 1 (15 oz) can garbanzo beans
- 2-4 Tbsp soy sauce or aminos
- Reserved shredded chicken

Instructions

1. Add 2 cups rice in the Instant Pot. Add 2 cups water. Cook on high pressure for 4 minutes. Quick release pressure when timer goes off.
2. In a wok or very large skillet, add fat and heat over medium high heat until it melts.
3. Add eggs, then scramble the eggs in the pan with a spatula or wooden spoon. Add onion, garlic and ginger and cook, stirring often.
4. When the eggs are translucent, add the remaining vegetables and stir-fry for 2-5 mins.
5. Add rice and chicken and fold to fully incorporate with the vegetables.
6. Gently fold in beans before adding soy sauce. Stir vegetable fried rice well and serve.

MEAL 6

Baked Potato Nachos

Ingredients

- 3 lb russet potato cut into 2" pieces
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 5 oz shredded carrots roughly chopped
- 2 ribs celery diced
- 1 cup cheddar cheese (optional) shredded
- Reserved shredded chicken

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 425F.
2. Cut the potatoes so they're about 1-2" in size and place in a large mixing bowl. Add 1 Tbsp olive oil and toss well. Season with 1/2 tsp salt and 1/4 tsp pepper and toss well again. Arrange onto a single layer on a cookie sheet. It's okay if they touch, but you don't want them stacked on top of each other.
3. Roast the potatoes in the oven for 20-30 minutes, or until the potatoes are medium golden brown.
4. Cover the potatoes evenly with the carrots, celery, and reserved protein, in that order.
5. Top with the cheeses and place back in the oven until the cheese melts and is bubbly, 10-15 minutes.
6. Serve with hot sauce, ranch dressing, or taco toppings as desired.

Spinach Salad

Ingredients

- Remaining bunch of spinach
- ¼ pint grape tomatoes
- ½ carrot
- ¼ onion
- ¼ cucumber
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds
- Reserved ranch dressing

Instructions

1. Wash and chop spinach and place in large bowl. Chop or dice remaining vegetables and place on top of spinach.
2. Add sunflower seeds and serve with dressing.

MEAL 7

BLT's with Veggie Sticks

Ingredients

- ½ lb bacon
- 8 slices of bread**
- 8 leaves lettuce
- 1 tomato, sliced
- 4 Tbsp mayo**
- 1 bell pepper, sliced
- 1 cucumber, sliced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- Any remaining ranch dressing

Instructions

1. In a large skillet, cook bacon over medium heat until crispy, about 10 minutes.
2. Toast bread in toaster or oven.
3. Spread mayo on each slice of bread. Layer each sandwich with 2 leaves lettuce, 2 strips bacon, 1 slice tomato.
4. Serve with veggie sticks and ranch.

*** This ingredient can be made from scratch to save money. Feel free to use the recipe we've included at the end of this meal plan.*

Additional Make From Scratch Recipes

Hamburger Buns

Ingredients

- 1¼ cup milk (cow, almond, soy, etc.)
- 1 large egg
- 6 Tbsp olive oil or melted butter
- 3 Tbsp sugar or honey
- 4 cups unbleached bread flour (may substitute up to half with white whole wheat flour)
- 1 Tbsp plus 1 tsp vital wheat gluten
- 2 tsp salt
- 2½ tsp yeast

Instructions

1. Measure yeast in a mixing bowl.
2. Warm milk to 105-110 degrees (I used the microwave and a candy thermometer) and pour into yeast. Let stand for 5-10 minutes while yeast activates.
3. When the yeast is slightly beer-foamy (milk won't make it as foamy as water does), add all of the other ingredients and mix on medium until dough is smooth and elastic (5-10 minutes).
4. Pour into a large oiled bowl and let rise in a warm place until dough is doubled in size, 1-1½ hours.
5. After the dough has risen, pour onto a flour surface and knead to form a long log-shape.
6. Cut dough (I use a pizza cutter) into 12** equal pieces.
7. Shape pieces into round buns and place on a cookie sheet.
8. Cover loosely with plastic wrap sprayed with cooking spray (sprayed side down).
9. Preheat oven to 375 degrees and let buns rise for 30 minutes.
10. Bake for 15-22 minutes until lightly browned.

15 Minute Spaghetti Sauce

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ onion, diced finely
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 lbs tomatoes, diced
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper

Instructions

1. Meanwhile, heat oil over medium heat and add onions and garlic. Cook until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add tomatoes and allow vegetables to cook for about 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Using a wooden spoon, squish any large pieces of tomatoes so that the sauce is slightly chunky, but without any significantly large pieces. If you want your homemade spaghetti sauce more of a paste, you can blend or mash tomatoes more.
3. Serve hot over pasta, adding additional salt and pepper as desired.

Instant Pot Beans

Ingredients

- 1 pound of beans, rinsed and picked over to remove debris
- 9 cups of water

Instructions

1. Place beans and water in the Instant Pot.
2. Seal the Instant Pot and make sure the pressure value is set to "sealing."
3. Press the "manual" or "pressure cook" button so that it is set to high pressure and use the "-" and "+" buttons to adjust the timer to 35 minutes.
4. When the timer goes off and the beans are done cooking, use the natural pressure release (i.e. do nothing).
5. Note: DO NOT use quick release when making more than one pound of beans.
6. Once the valve indicator has gone down, it is safe to open the Instant Pot.
7. Drain the beans and use in your favorite recipes!

Instant Pot Chicken Stock

Ingredients

- chicken bones (from one whole chicken, or saved bones)
- 2 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- aromatics, if desired (onion, celery, carrots, etc., can be whole or scraps/peels)
- water to fill the Instant Pot to the max line

Instructions

1. Place all the ingredients in the Instant Pot and fill with water to the max line.
2. Turn the pressure valve to "sealing" and press the "soup/broth" button. If you don't have that button, you can press the "manual" or "pressure cook" button so your pot is on medium pressure.
3. Use the "-" and "+" buttons to adjust the timer to cook for 30 minutes.
4. When the timer has gone off, use natural pressure release (i.e. do nothing) to let the pressure come down on its own. If you are in a rush, you can use the quick release pressure method, but be careful when turning the valve from "sealing" to "venting" so that your hands and face are NOT over the holds of the vent.
5. When the pot is finished venting and the float valve has come down, pour the contents of the Instant Pot through a colander into a large pot.
6. Freeze or can the chicken stock if you are not using right away. If you still have bones, repeat this process as desired.

Taco Seasoning

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp chili
- 1 Tbsp cumin
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp pepper
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp garlic
- ½ tsp onion
- ½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- ½ tsp oregano

Instructions

1. Combine all ingredients in a glass jar.
2. Shake well and use as desired.

Homemade 2 Minute Mayo

Ingredients

- 1 large lemon, juiced (or 2 tbsp lemon juice)
- 1 tsp kosher salt (or ½ tsp table salt)
- 1 whole egg
- 1 cup light olive oil
- immersion blender

Instructions

1. In a wide-mouth jar, layer your ingredients as follows. First, lemon juice. Second, salt. Third, egg. Finally, light olive oil.
2. Wait about one minute, or until the egg is at the bottom of the jar and the oils is sitting at the top of the jar.
3. Place the immersion blender in the jar, all the way to the bottom.
4. With the immersion blender at the bottom of the jar, press the button to "go" and let it blend for 20 seconds while sitting at the bottom of the jar.
5. After 5 seconds, you'll have mayo at the bottom.
6. At the 10-15 second mark, you'll notice the mayo creeping to the top.
7. At about 20 seconds, you'll have mayo near the top of the ingredients with a very thin layer of oil right on top.
8. Very slowly (and carefully), bring the immersion blend up the side of the jar while still blending. As you do this, the thin layer of oil on the top will slowly drizzle down the side of the jar and blend with the mayo underneath.
9. Keep bringing your immersion blender almost to the top, stopping just short so you don't splatter mayo everywhere. Your mayo is done when all the ingredients are incorporated together!
10. Taste your mayo and adjust your salt and/or lemon juice if desired.

Homemade Bread

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups warm water
- 2 ¼ tsp active dry yeast
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 ½ - 4 cups all-purpose flour

Instructions

1. Combine yeast and warm water in a bowl or in the bowl of a stand mixer and allow yeast to bloom.
2. Add remaining ingredients and knead until the dough is smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes.
3. Cover with a towel and allow to rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 – 1 ½ hours.
4. Pour onto a lightly floured surface and flatten to about 2" tall. Separate into two equal parts. Working with one section at a time, gently punch the dough down and out, then folding the dough over itself.
5. Turn ¼ turn. Repeat this punching and turning process 3-4 times. Shape the dough into a log and place it smooth side up into a loaf pan. Repeat with the remaining dough. Cover both loaves with a towel and allow to rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 45-60 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400F.
6. When the dough is ready, slash the top lightly with a serrated knife. Bake the loaves for 25-30 minutes, or until the top is browned and the loaf sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom.
7. Allow to cool completely before slicing.