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## DINNER IN 30

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for fast,  
healthy meals

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Crunched for time?  
A little planning goes a long  
way. Get your weeknight meals  
on the table in no time with  
these strategies

# DINNER IN

# 30

BY KERRI-ANN JENNINGS

REVIEWED BY HANSA BHARGAVA, MD, WEBMD MEDICAL EDITOR

You want to put a healthy meal on the table, but the hectic crunch of weeknights can make it hard to muster anything more than a plate of spaghetti or some takeout. With a few easy strategies, you can feed your family (or just yourself) a well-balanced, flavorful meal in less than 30 minutes.

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY LEIGH BEISCH  
FOOD STYLING BY DAN BECKER  
PROP STYLING BY GLENN JENKINS





## BE PREPARED

“Plan to be busy later,” says Jill Nussinow, RD, “The Veggie Queen” and author of *Nutrition CHAMPS*. “I pretend that someone cooks for me—I keep my freezer stocked with ready-to-go beans, corn, cooked brown rice, and vegetables, so I can assemble a healthy meal in minutes.” She also recommends frozen meals—either store-bought or homemade—for those nights where all you can do is turn on the microwave. Look for healthy versions, though—low in salt and fat, high in fiber and nutrients.

## TURN TO TEMPLATE RECIPES

Have a handful of simple recipes in your back pocket to whip up meals with virtually no effort. These can be as easy as rice and beans, omelets, chicken tenders with pan sauce, or quesadillas. Experiment with new recipes when you have more time and feel like cooking. Pull out one of your fallback dinners when you want dinner on the table pronto.

### Pesto Spaghetti With Shrimp

Frozen shrimp and prepared pesto are two pantry staples that make this dish a cinch to whip up. If you have a spiralizer, you can use that to make long curly strands of zucchini “pasta,” but a box grater also works—adding grated zucchini to pasta gives you a more heaping serving of noodles while keeping carbs in check.

Makes 4 servings

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tsp olive oil, divided
- 1 lb raw shrimp (any size—if frozen, let thaw before cooking)
- 1 large zucchini, grated or spiralized
- ½ lb dry spaghetti
- ½ cup pesto (homemade or jarred)

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat 1 tsp olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add shrimp and cook until it turns pink and is cooked through (3–6 minutes, depending on size). Remove shrimp from pan and set aside in a serving bowl.
2. Add remaining oil and zucchini and cook a couple minutes until golden. Remove zucchini to serving bowl with shrimp.
3. Put spaghetti in the same pan and cover with water. Bring water to a boil and cook until al dente (about 10 minutes). The spaghetti will absorb the water in the pan. Remove spaghetti with pasta fork and add to serving bowl. Add pesto and toss to combine.

#### PER SERVING

479 calories, 31 g protein, 48 g carbohydrate, 18 g fat (4 g saturated fat), 187 mg cholesterol, 3 g fiber, 5 g sugar, 409 mg sodium. Calories from fat: 33%

### Chickpea-Cauliflower Curry

This recipe can easily be doubled, but be sure to pack up leftovers before you sit down to dinner for better portion control. Serve with cooked brown rice. (Keep bags of cooked, portioned brown rice in your freezer.)

Makes 3 servings

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp canola oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
- 1 tbsp peeled, minced ginger
- 1 tbsp curry powder
- salt to taste
- 1 can light coconut milk
- 1 bag frozen cauliflower florets, thawed
- 1 15.5-oz can chickpeas, rinsed and drained

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat.
2. Add onion, garlic, and ginger and cook 1–2 minutes. Add curry powder and salt and continue to cook until onion is soft.
3. Whisk in coconut milk. Add cauliflower and chickpeas and cook until heated through.

#### PER SERVING

248 calories, 9 g protein, 27 g carbohydrate, 12 g fat (5 g saturated fat), 9 g fiber, 5 g sugar, 449 mg sodium. Calories from fat: 44%



## SPICE IT UP

Use spice blends to make the same old, same old fresh and new. You can make blends yourself or buy them ready-made. Try harissa or za’atar for a Middle Eastern flavor or jerk seasoning to bring your palate to the Caribbean. Nussinow suggests adding tomatoes, garlic, oregano, and basil for an Italian-tasting dish, and sesame, soy sauce, ginger, and garlic for an Asian-inspired meal. She often cooks a basic lentil soup and then adds different seasonings each day to keep it exciting.

## BALANCE IT OUT

Adhere to the no-fail formula of protein + produce + starch for a satisfying, balanced dinner every time. For example, balance out a side of pizza (protein/starch) with a large salad. Add shredded chicken, baby spinach, and sliced mushrooms to quesadillas.





Check out [Best and Worst Meals for Diabetes Dining](#), a slideshow at [WebMD.com](#).

LEARN HOW ON  
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## HAVE VEGETABLES READY TO GO

In an ideal world, you'd shop on the weekends and wash, dry, and prep a variety of produce so you can throw it into meals at a moment's notice. But if that's not realistic, buy fresh vegetables that are precut (a particularly good call for intimidating types like winter squash) or frozen vegetables and fruit.

## PREP YOUR PANTRY

A good pantry (as well as a stocked fridge and freezer) can keep you from ordering out. Make sure you have the basics of your template meals on hand (pasta, beans, tuna, tomato sauce, jarred pesto). Plan for a few nights where you can just whip up a simple dish, like pasta with frozen veggies or a frittata and salad.

## Polenta With Chicken Sausages and Broccoli Rabe

Quick-cooking polenta is a cinch to make and offers a creamy base for peppery broccoli rabe and sweet Italian sausages.

Makes 4 servings

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
- 1 bunch broccoli rabe, rinsed and shaken to dry, and lightly, roughly chopped
- pinch of red pepper flakes
- salt and pepper to taste
- 4 cooked sweet Italian chicken sausages
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup quick-cooking polenta
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and cook 1 minute. Add damp broccoli rabe and cover. Continue cooking until rabe is soft, 5–10 minutes. Add red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Remove rabe mixture from pan and transfer to a serving bowl. Cover to keep warm.
2. Place chicken sausages in the same pan and cook until heated through (about 5 minutes), turning once.
3. While sausages cook, prepare polenta. In a medium saucepan, bring chicken stock and water to a boil. Slowly whisk in polenta and continue to cook until polenta firms enough to pull away from sides of pan (takes about 5 minutes). Remove from heat and stir in Parmesan. Divide polenta among dishes and serve with broccoli rabe and sausage.

### PER SERVING

372 calories, 23 g protein, 38 g carbohydrate, 13 g fat (4 g saturated fat), 72 mg cholesterol, 7 g fiber, 2 g sugar, 655 mg sodium. Calories from fat: 32%