

#245 - How I Personally Meal Plan

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 245 - how I personally meal plan. It's funny - I talk about meal planning a lot here on the podcast, on Instagram, and in my upcoming book that I can't wait for you to read, The Lazy Genius Kitchen. But I don't know that I've ever shared how I personally meal plan! My guess is that's because I don't want to be prescriptive and tell you how to do it, that you somehow have to copy my approach. But seeing the nitty gritty can be helpful in figuring out your own nitty gritty, so that's what I'm going to share today.

Now, a word to you reluctant meal planners. The phrase "meal plan" is gross to a lot of people. It conjures up images of systems you don't want to maintain, so let me remind us all of a couple of truths.

First, you get to decide what matters. If a thorough system matters to you and helps you get food on the table in a way that you love, please keep your thorough system. If you are not in a season of life where planning ahead is feasible, please don't feel badly about that. The system is not the measurement for whether or not you're doing a good job at meal planning or if that's even a thing. Name what matters to you, and then slowly make decisions that support it, whatever that might look like, especially when it looks very different from someone else. That's normal and okay. This isn't a contest.

Second truth to remind you of: not everything can matter. For meals especially, you cannot hold equal priority for the following words: quick, easy, healthy, homemade, and cheap. And frankly there are dozens of others you could list. Meals feel overwhelming because you think you can check off every single box with every single meal, and that's just not going to happen. There are the rare magical recipes that cover more than usual. My favorite example is Change Your Life Chicken which is on my website, episode 100 is all about troubleshooting it, and it is my legacy. The joke is there will be a chicken on my tombstone. But even Change Your Life Chicken isn't a magic pill to seemingly perfect meal planning every single time. You cannot prioritize everything for every meal. You can't even prioritize everything for every season of your life! Some seasons can hold more homemade food than others, some seasons can require more time than others... it changes with you and your skills and your schedule and your needs. Please please please remember that not everything can matter, and again that is normal. If you think you're missing out on some magical meal planning gene or that you can't find the secret cookbook that will get you in a flow with dinner, you're going to drive yourself crazy looking for something that doesn't exist. There is not a system that exists for every person in every season. There are tools you can use to build a system that works for you, and we'll go through those next, but remember that not everything can matter. Please let some stuff go.

And finally, remember that meal planning is just deciding what you're eating a little ahead of time. How far ahead is up to you, how much you plan is up to you, but don't get bogged down

by the phrase meal planning and think that it's more complicated than it is. It's just deciding what you're eating a little ahead of time.

Next up, let's do a quick glossary review. There are three tools that I use to meal plan in different ways in different seasons, but before I start throwing the terms around, let me define them here.

The first term for Lazy Genius meal planning is brainless crowdpleasers. These are meals that take very little brain power on the part of the cook and are generally pleasing to the people who will eat the food. The beauty of this term is that anything - any meal, any recipe - can be a brainless crowdpleaser. There are recipes that you might cook that have multiple steps and look kind of complicated but because you've been making them for so long or were taught how to make them as a kid or whatever, they don't require brainpower. You can more or less go into autopilot and make this meal. The same goes for crowdpleasing. Your crowd might enjoy something mine does not and vice versa. A brainless crowdpleaser for you could be roasted salmon with rice and sauteed spinach, and for someone else, that would require way too much brain. So you get to decide what a brainless crowdpleaser is for you.

The reason you need brainless crowdpleasers in your life - and frankly, you already have them even if you haven't named them as such - is because you need quick wins. You need dinners that you don't have to think about, stress over, and wonder if anyone will complain. You need a confident choice, even if it's hot dogs.

You can have two brainless crowdpleasers, you can have 22, it doesn't matter. But list them out. Write them down somewhere. Have a list that you can reference when you need to choose what's for dinner.

The second term to know is a meal matrix. A meal matrix is a way for you to decide once - a beloved Lazy Genius principle - what you'll eat on what day. It's the scaffolding of your meal planning decisions, the plug-and-play part of your plan. You might have a meal matrix that covers every day of the week - Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday, Soup Wednesday, Rice Bowl Thursday, Pizza Friday, Takeout Saturday, and Leftover Sunday. You might only want to Matrix one or two days a week. You can assign decisions to as many days as you want, and you can categorize your decision based on anything you want. You can create a Meal Matrix based around cooking methods or appliances, around ingredients, around how long things take, around cuisines... you can mix up a bunch of those, too. You're basically deciding what kind of meal you need to have on a certain day, and you lock that in until it doesn't work anymore.

And the third term in our meal planning glossary is a dinner queue. A dinner queue is a curated list of meals that make sense for the season of life or season of the year that you're in. It's like a summer reading list or a Netflix queue. You've looked at the collective whole of all your choices and you've picked the ones that you want to focus on, that make sense right now. A dinner queue keeps you from searching the entirety of the internet and your cookbook collection and

your saved recipes on instagram to pick tomorrow's dinner. Make it smaller. Make it simpler. A dinner queue helps you do that.

Now before I get into how I personally meal plan using these tools, I have fun news. I have a book coming out on March 22 which is ten weeks away, you guys, what on earth, called The Lazy Genius Kitchen. It's a resource you will use forever and always on how to be a person in the kitchen. Every month, we have new preorder bonuses for folks who decide to buy the book early before it's released to say a huge thank you for putting your trust in me, and this month's preorder bonus are cute, simple digital downloads of places to list out your brainless crowdpleasers, your dinner queue, and even monthly calendar sheets for your personal meal planning. They're so cute and free in your inbox when you preorder the book and then - and this is a very important part - you go to thelazygeniuskitchen.com and tell us your order information. Just because you preorder from whatever retailer you want doesn't mean you get the bonuses. You have to come tell us that you did so that you can be put into your system and get those bonuses delivered to you! This month are these cool meal planning downloads.

The other piece of news is that I'm going live on Instagram tomorrow, Tuesday January 18th at 1pm eastern time @thelazygenius to answer all your meal planning questions and explain how I meal plan a month at a time. I won't go into that super specifically here today, but I will tomorrow on Instagram live so be sure you join me there! I used to do Instagram lives every single week, and we don't do them nearly as often anymore so I'm excited to hang out with y'all!

We'll be right back...

Now let me explain how I use those meal planning tools to decide what's for dinner.

My personal meal planning routine starts on Sundays, usually in the morning if I don't have to be at church early to play music or run sound. If not, I do it in the afternoon, or at least that's the goal. Does this happen every single Sunday without a hitch? Of course not. Remember, plans are intentions, not pass/fail. If I don't meal plan like I planned on a Sunday, that doesn't mean my system or my soul are broken. I just didn't get to meal plan like I wanted. It's all gonna be okay.

So most Sunday mornings, I pull out my paper planner, my phone, and a pad of paper. Those are my constant tools. Depending on what I need from my meal plan, I might add a cookbook to the pile. Now, how I move forward with my meal plan depends on if I've already made a meal plan for the month where some stuff is already penciled in. Sometimes I have it, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I take the time to make one then, sometimes I don't. I'll go into the process of a monthly meal plan and how it's way easier than you think on tomorrow's Instagram live, or you can watch an old highlight of how I do it, but for the sake of this conversation now, let's assume I do not have a monthly meal plan in place.

Now here's something that helps me. I do my weekly meal planning at the same time I do my actual weekly planning. I look at the week ahead, I move appointments from my Google

calendar to my paper planner, and I make better, more comprehensive choices because I'm looking at everything collectively, not just meals separate from everything else.

A quick side note: I only put things in my paper planner week to week, not when they immediately come up. Appointments and stuff go in my Google calendar first, and then I use my paper planner to organize my week but only one week at a time.

Okay, so I move my meetings and appointments to my paper planner. I also look at my to-do list for the week that exists in a digital place for my business and move it to my paper planner. Then I look at a white board we have in the kitchen that holds little reminders of things we need to do, I look at last week's to do list and anything that didn't get done, and I add all of those to my weekly planner. I also check the weather in this process. Sometimes that affects things, and sometimes it doesn't. Now I don't know that I realized that so many other things go into figuring out what's for dinner, but for me it makes sense. For my family and my personality and my schedule, all of it is part of one flow of energy. If I have a longer task list and more appointments on a day, it makes total sense that the dinner that night needs to be as utterly brainless as possible. It's hard for me to plan concretely what's for dinner without knowing what's in the day. That's why when I mentioned the monthly meal plan, some things are penciled in. They're just placeholders because I can't always know how busy a day is until I get into its week.

So as I look at my week, I notice what days need the most brainless crowdpleasing meals, and I write them down. The planner that I use that I'm really loving - it might be my favorite planner I've ever used - is the Moleskin Pro 12 month weekly vertical planner. It has full month calendars in the front which is where I put meals and plan out a month if I want, and when I don't have a month of meals planned, it's where I put dinner choices regardless one week at a time. I also have our list of brainless crowdpleasers written on a blank notes page in the back of that planner, so it's all in one place, at least for now. It's working now, and I'll keep using it until it doesn't work anymore.

So I have the planner opened to my weekly spread where I see my days, my flags, my chairs (more on that in episode 177 - how to plan a day), and I write down meals in the monthly calendar as I flip back and forth between that and my list of brainless crowdpleasers. So I write in ones that make sense for the week. And because I write down those meals in that monthly calendar page, I can see what we had last week and the week before and can make decisions of how long it's been since we've had spaghetti and if I'm ready to plan it again. I like putting meals on a monthly calendar regardless of whether or not I plan a month at a time.

Once brainless crowdpleasers are in their place, I fill in any holes using my meal matrix. We have pizza every Friday, sometimes Saturday depending on the weekend. We also always have a leftovers or hot dogs day, sometimes it's leftovers or breakfast depending on the vibe, but we always have a "leftovers or" meal. I also usually plan pasta on Mondays because pasta is easy and my kids don't complain. It's just a dependable way to start the week. We also almost always have some kind of rice bowl every week. Trader Joe's mandarin chicken and rice, tikka masala which is on the website and rice, Change Your Life Shawarma which is also on the website and

rice, stirfry and rice, pork and mushrooms which is on the website and rice. We like stuff on rice. I even have an entire podcast episode series on food in a bowl, primarily bowls filled with rice. Those links will all be in the show notes if you'd like them. So I fill in empty spots using my meal matrix. It limits my decision making which I always love.

Then if any blocks are leftover or if I really want to add something new to the mix, I'll pull out a cookbook - one cookbook - and choose something from it. Most of the time, that decision is limited as well because when I get a new cookbook, I read it and mark pages of recipes I know will work for my family - not just ones I'm excited about because I'm excited about a lot of recipes that don't make sense in my life right now. So I mark recipes that fit now. It's kind of like a dinner queue in cookbook form, and I mark those pages with a little bit of washi tape. That way when I flip through, I only flip to those washi taped pages and not the entire book. So I might choose something new from there.

Then I have that pad of paper, right? And I will as I go make a grocery list of things I need. Some things I already know I have - staples for our particular kitchen - or I'll take the time to check to make sure we have what we need. Then I'll schedule a grocery pickup for that stuff for the next day, or if what I need isn't at Walmart or Target or if I just want to go inside the store, I plan when I'm going. I can't leave it to chance. It must be planned. If that plan doesn't work out, that's okay. Plans are intentions, not pass/fail.

The final step is I copy the meals I planned and wrote in my paper planner onto a dry erase board in the kitchen. That is so my children who ask what's for dinner when they're eating breakfast can know what's for dinner without asking me. And I don't mind answering them, but they also ask all the time and usually don't remember the answer, so having it written down and saying "look at the board!" helps me not get angry.

And that's how I personally meal plan. Just so you know, we eat 90% brainless crowdpleasers, and our list of those is about 20-25 meals. So we repeat a lot. We eat the same general things over and over again, but as I've said in multiple places over the last few years, that's the season we're in, and that's okay. It matters more to me that we eat in a way that is reasonably pleasant and not super stressful than eating new stuff a lot. That's our priority, so we build around that. And by the way, all of this takes about 15 minutes. It's not a huge task. It's a fairly simple rhythm because of those tools. Because of the list of brainless crowdpleasers, because of our loose meal matrix, and because of limited choices in a dinner queue, whether that's a written list or a choice to cook from just one cookbook or website at a time. You can make these tools work for you.

I'm guessing you'll have questions about meal planning and I am so excited to answer them tomorrow, Tuesday, January 18th at 1pm EST on Instagram @thelazygenius. Can't wait to see you then.

Okay, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Debbie with no last name that I personally know who left a comment on the blog post for Change Your Life Shawarma which I

mentioned earlier. She simply shared that she tried the shawarma in the airfryer, is still playing with the timing of 30 minutes, but that it worked great. Here's why this is worth celebrating. One, I got an airfryer for christmas slash my birthday, and I will keep you posted on all the airfryer things. So far, I really love it. We use it every day. Two and most importantly, I love it when y'all make Lazy Genius things work for you. My goal is to have a collection of versatile, personalized tools and a culture of so much permission so you can adjust and make things work based on what matters to you. And even though it was just trying a new cooking method, Debbie did that by trying shawarma in the airfryer! I love it when y'all make stuff your own, so thank you Debbie for being our Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today. Don't forget about tomorrow's Instagram live, and thank you so much for listening today. 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!