

The 11 Secrets for Making Fast, Easy, Delicious and Healthy Meals

1. **Make sure you have (or buy) the right equipment first.**

- Microwave
- Blender
- Vegetable grater/slicer
- Cutting board (I use a flexible one)
- Can opener (Oxo makes a nice one)
- Glass bowls for microwaving food
- Tupperware for storing food
- Portable lunch cooler bag
- Ice packs
- Storage bags (such as Ziploc)
- Paper plates/bowls & Plastic cups
- A sharp knife for cutting veggies
- Plastic utensils
- Apple corer

2. **Buy healthy foods that need no or very little preparation.**

Some Examples:

- Raw vegetables for making quick salads (sliced mushrooms, baby carrots, packaged lettuce, cherry tomatoes)
- Pre-cut fresh vegetables in a bag for quick microwaving (or stir-frying if you prefer)
- Other vegetables to microwave (corn, broccoli, asparagus, green beans, carrots, etc.)
- Raw fruit (bananas and apples are especially easy)
- Pre-cut raw fruit
- Individual-sized yogurts (non or low-fat. I buy **Kroeger's** Carb Master yogurts at Ralph's)
- Cottage cheese (non or low-fat)
- Low-fat cheese slices or string cheese
- Egg Beaters or Just Egg Whites (or eggs if you don't mind cracking them)
- **Trader Joe's** frozen brown rice (or make fresh brown rice in a rice cooker)
- Whole grain cereals and non or low-fat milk (or soy milk – I use **Silk** Light, plain flavor)
- Whole grain breads, tortillas, bagels, crackers
- Sweet potatoes (they microwave well)
- Plain, unflavored oatmeal (add Splenda, fruit, cinnamon or anything healthy you like)
- Peanut butter and sugar-free jam (for making whole grain sandwiches in a pinch)
- Soup in a can (or 32 oz. carton) (I like **Trader Joe's** Creamy Corn & Roasted Pepper Soup)
- Sushi
- Low-fat Deli items (cooked meat, chicken, fish, seafood, vegetarian items, whole meals)
- Canned beans (kidney, black, pinto, etc.) and canned low-fat chili (I like **Amy's** brand)
- Canned tuna fish (preferably in spring water, no salt added)
- Nuts and seeds (in moderation they are a source of good fat and have protein)
- Frozen dinners (especially **South Beach Diet** ones)
- Refrigerated dinners (**Whole Foods** "Meals To Go" & **Trader Joe's** meals are great)
- **Zen Bakery** makes delicious and healthy low-fat, whole grain bakery foods
- **South Beach Diet** makes delicious and healthy cookies and 100 calorie snack bars
- **Jello** Pudding and nonfat milk

3. Use healthy herbs, spices, condiments, seasonings and sauces for making your food taste great!

Some Examples:

- Soy sauce (I buy **Kikkoman** low-sodium soy-sauce)
- Teriyaki sauce
- BBQ sauce (can be mixed with vegetable broth to make less sweet and less thick)
- Steak sauce
- Salt and pepper
- I use creamy corn and roasted red pepper soup as a sauce (would go great with fish)
- Low-fat canned gravy
- Non or low-fat salad dressings (mix with vegetable broth to make less thick)
- Feta cheese (**Trader Joe's** makes an excellent "light feta cheese")
- Low-fat mayonnaise (I use **Best Foods** Reduced Fat Mayonnaise Dressing – 2 grams of fat)
- Low-fat spaghetti sauce
- Wheat germ (I put **Kretschmer** wheat germ on top of yogurt and cottage cheese to add taste and fiber)
- Apple butter (I get "no sugar added")
- Apple sauce (I get "no sugar added")
- Raisins, dried dates (great on non-sugary cereal or as a trail mix with nuts)
- I mostly use cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves and ginger to spice desserts
- I mostly use curry, pepper, cumin, cayenne pepper and mustard for vegetables, proteins
- I mostly use dill, basil, oregano, rosemary, bay leaves and thyme for Italian foods
- Ketchup (I use Heinz no-salt added Ketchup)
- Mustard
- Pickles
- Non or low-fat whipped cream
- Protein powder (I use **Jay Robb's** chocolate whey protein powder)
- Fat-free, sugar-free Jello pudding (I like chocolate fudge the best)
- Any others that are low in fat that you like

4. Use acceptable sugars and "good" fats (in moderation) for added taste.

- Splenda has no calories and is a derivative of sugar
- Stevia is an all natural calorie-free sweetener that comes from the Stevia plant
- Agave nectar is very low on the Glycemic Index but not calorie free (60 kcals./tablespoon)
- Olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil and fish oils are all excellent choices
- Peanut butter, almond butter and avocados are delicious high fat foods that add a lot of flavor as well as nutrition (use in moderation because they're high in calories too!)

5. Put a list of fast, easy, healthy and delicious foods on your refrigerator.

- It can serve as a helpful reminder of what to eat and act as your shopping list too!

6. Start with the foods that take the longest time to cook first.

- Frozen dinners, refrigerated dinners, fresh corn, Trader Joe's frozen brown rice can each be put in the microwave before a vegetable is cut or other food prepared.

- 7. When cutting up or grating vegetables, make enough for 2 days.**
 - For salads, one of the salads you can eat today and one you can save for tomorrow. Don't add cut tomatoes (or other moist vegetables) to tomorrow's salad. Whole cherry tomatoes are okay to add.
 - For other veggies, save in Tupperware.
 - Cut vegetables sitting in the refrigerator for more than 2 days aren't as fresh.

- 8. Think about getting a balanced variety of foods when making a meal.**
 - Starches (rice, pasta, cereal, bread, potatoes, oatmeal, corn, crackers, etc.) provide sustained energy but can add weight if eaten in excess of calories needed per day.
 - Fruits provide quick energy and lots of vitamins and minerals for healthy functioning.
 - Sweet vegetables (beets, carrots, corn, green peas, etc.) provide quick energy.
 - Most other vegetables provide energy that is in-between quick and sustained. Vegetable are one of the best sources of vitamins and minerals.
 - Meats, poultry, fish, seafood, beans and dairy products provide protein for rebuilding tissues (especially muscle tissue if you are working out regularly).
 - Fats provide great taste and sustained energy. They also satisfy hunger when eaten with nutritious foods.
 - Natural sweeteners (sugar, honey, fructose, lactose in dairy products, molasses, maple syrup, etc.) provide great taste but "empty calories" and spikes in blood sugar so use very sparingly.
 - Splenda and stevia are very good choices for adding sweetness without any calories.
 - Agave nectar is a liquid sweetener that can be substituted for honey or maple syrup and has a very low Glycemic-index.

- 9. Use the blender for making delicious fruit smoothies and protein drinks.**
 - Fruit smoothies and protein drinks can be used as a meal, a dessert or as a snack depending on the calorie content of the drink.
 - Look online or buy a book for recipes..... or experiment on your own!
 - I pour the smoothie or protein drink into a recyclable 24 oz. water bottle (with sport top) using a funnel. I drink 24 oz. of water in the morning and then fill up the water bottle with a smoothie or protein drink for a mid-morning snack (after a workout).

- 10. Use a portable lunch cooler bag (with ice packs if keeping food cold) when away from home and with no access to quick, delicious, healthy food.**
 - I also pack napkins, eating utensils (plastic or metal depending on how long away), a drink of some sort (water usually) and multi-vitamin, multi-mineral tablets.

- 11. Practice, practice, practice!**
 - There's always a learning curve when doing something new so experiment and practice and you'll be making delicious and healthy meals quickly and easily in no time.