

## Prepare These 8 Foods on the Weekend for Healthy Eating All Week

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*An hour or two of weekend food preparation can help you put together healthier meals throughout the week.*

If you are willing to invest a little time in the kitchen on the weekend to get ready for the week ahead, it can really pay off. After spending just a couple of hours on a Sunday to prepare some foods ahead of time, the benefit comes in the form of quick, healthy meals and snacks for the week.

This doesn't mean you have to have *all* your meals for the week planned and prepped in advance – but you can plan to prepare some basic items to get you through the week. Rather than planning out each *meal*, you can prepare some staple *foods and ingredients* on the weekend – items that you can use in a variety of ways to prepare lunches and dinners for the week.

### Eight Healthy Foods to Prepare on the Weekend

**Salad greens.** Pre-washed salad greens are convenient, but they can be pricey. Instead, buy a variety of lettuces and greens, break them into bite-sized pieces for salads, then wash and dry thoroughly – ideally in a salad spinner. Then wrap in a clean kitchen towel and store them in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. The greens don't get soggy this way, and they stay fresh for a full week.

**Pre-cut vegetables.** To make quick work of making salads, you can prepare a lot of different vegetables and store them in individual containers in the refrigerator. Some that keep well include thinly sliced cucumbers, red onion and bell pepper, grated carrots and chopped parsley; you can also blanch some broccoli or cauliflower florets or roast some zucchini slices or asparagus spears in a hot oven and chill those, too. When it's time to make a salad, it takes less than five minutes to choose the veggies you want and top it off with a little salad dressing. But it doesn't stop there – these veggies get worked into a lot of meals throughout the week, too.

**Pan-seared chicken tenders.** Having cooked chicken on hand is a real lifesaver. Starting with about two pounds (1kg) of chicken tenders (courjons), sprinkle them with a little salt, pepper and paprika, then brown them on one side in a little bit of olive oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Then, flip them over, add a few tablespoons of liquid to the skillet (white wine, broth, water, or lemon juice), cover the skillet and let them cook for 5-6 minutes until they're done. You can add these to a salad or stuff some into a whole grain pita pocket with some of the pre-cut veggies and a drizzle of hummus for a quick lunch. Or, if you make a quick soup or pasta for dinner, it's nice to have some cooked chicken to toss in at the last minute.

**Beans or lentils.** Slow cookers are great for making beans or lentils, and the fantastic flavor and texture of the homemade version is worth the effort of a few minutes spent in the kitchen. Once the beans are cooked, store in the refrigerator and add into your salad, or use as a base for a soup or chili. If you have cooked lentils, you can toss them with some of your pre-cut chopped vegetables for a main dish salad, or turn them into a curry for dinner.

**Hard boiled eggs.** Eggs are one of the best protein sources around, and it only takes a few minutes to hard boil them. Hard boiled eggs are great when added to salads, or you might slice one up and place on whole grain crackers or tomato slices for a quick snack.

**Tuna salad.** When you have tuna salad in the refrigerator, it makes it a lot easier to work more fish into your diet. Try mixing flaked tuna with either mashed avocado or some hummus, a little mustard, and a lot of your chopped vegetables. Tuna salad can be placed on top of your salad as a protein source, or you can have a little scoop for a high-protein snack on some whole-grain crackers.

**Hummus.** Hummus takes only a few minutes to make and will stay fresh in the refrigerator for a week. It's also very inexpensive to make compared with the price of store-bought versions. Drain the liquid from a can of beans (garbanzos/chickpeas are traditional, but other beans work just as well), then rinse and drain again. Whirl them in the blender with a little olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper until smooth. Hummus with raw veggies makes a great snack, but you can also use it in place of mayonnaise in tuna or egg salad, or thin it down with a little vinegar and water for a delicious salad dressing or sauce on steamed vegetables.

**Salad dressing.** When you consider the cost of the ingredients, bottled dressings are relatively expensive, and they're often high in salt, sugar and preservatives. Making your own dressing is simple, and allows you to control the ingredients. Mix two parts olive oil to one part acid (citrus juice, vinegar), then add salt and pepper to taste. You can experiment with adding dried herbs, mustard, garlic powder or onion powder, too. In addition to using on salads, you can also drizzle one of these flavorful dressings over steamed veggies, or use as a marinade for fish or poultry.