

#76 - The Lazy Genius Meal Plan

Hey, guys! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, 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 #76 - The Lazy Genius Meal Plan. We've been waiting for this one, haven't we? We're finally talking about meal planning! Getting dinner on the table happens most every day, and we're still surprised it has to happen. I have to make dinner again? There are a lot of perspectives on meal planning, why it's important, and who it's for, but in this episode, I hope you find the way meal planning works for you. You don't need to copy anyone else's plan unless you really want to, but the Lazy Genius way might just be your last meal planning stop. This is how I plan and have for years, and it still works. In fact, it gets easier because it builds on itself, so in this episode, I'm going to show you how.

Step number one: have a list of brainless crowdpleasers. I talked about this in last week's episode - The Lazy Genius Stocks the Kitchen - so you might already have a head start. Brainless crowdpleasers are recipes that don't require much brain power from you as the cook and generally please the crowd you're feeding. This isn't block party crowd or church small group crowd. It's just you or you and your nuclear family, the people generally around your table. And crowdpleasing doesn't necessarily mean everyone is throwing a party and it's the most delicious thing ever. Everyone is just generally pleased. Small expectations. Little to no complaining. Don't go for the gold every time.

Your list of brainless crowdpleasers could be five things, and it could be 25. You might be surprised at how many you have actually! I listed some of mine in the last episode, but include convenience foods in your list like frozen pizza and Trader Joe's mandarin chicken. Include recipes that feel like they're not even worth writing down like spaghetti and hot dogs. Don't necessarily assume that your list will look like everyone else's. One meal that's so easy if you know how to cook it is a quickly sautéed piece of salmon over rice and spinach. Delicious with a dash of sesame oil, and if you have rice made or already cooked in the freezer, you can have that meal in ten minutes. So brainless crowdpleasers don't have to necessarily be all brown foods or all cheap foods or all foods you find on a restaurant kids menu. Those things belong, too, but keep an open mind.

So after your brainless crowdpleasers, you move to step two - know what you're planning for. Making a plan is just giving priority to something you care about, so if you're wanting to meal plan, what do you care about? What are you planning for? The answers are varied and plentiful. Are you planning to eat more whole foods? To expose yourself and your family to interesting flavors? To teach your teenage kids how to cook? To eat together every night even though everyone is going different directions most of the time?

For me, the reason I meal plan is because I don't like feeling crazy between 4:30pm and 7:30pm. I have a brain that never stops, and if I throw the stress of cooking and kids complaining and tons of dirty dishes on my already-tired brain, I become a mean person. And I don't want to be a mean person. So I meal plan so that I don't lose my mind. It's all about selfishly preserving my sanity which makes me home a happier place to be in.

Knowing why you plan leads us to step three. Once you know your singular purpose, decide your planning parameters. Step three is decide your planning parameters. What do I mean by

planning parameters? If you know why you're meal planning, what kinds of recipes become the most helpful? Which recipes aren't helpful at all? Your planning parameters help you weed out what to choose and what to ignore.

This is the trickiest of The Meal Plan steps, so let me talk you through it and give you a couple of examples. If you're a working mom, the reason you meal plan is so that you don't have to make dinner decisions when you get home after a long day of working and making decisions. You also might need to have dinner ready twenty minutes after you walk in the door because you work until 5:30pm. If that's why you're planning, what parameters will help you make those plans work best? What recipes do you need to fulfill that purpose? You need to focus on one) crockpot or Instant Pot recipes that can be set up in the morning and hang out all day and two) dead simple recipes that can come together in minutes that aren't even actual recipes like a platter of crackers, cheese, salami, sliced apples, and a bowl of hummus. Or a rotisserie chicken, quickly sautéed spinach, and a loaf of crusty bread. You're just assembling already made delicious food. Those are your two planning parameters. What recipes do you not want? Ones that require a lot of time or ingredients. You're not making risotto, you're not making casseroles that have to be put together and still bake for an hour, you're not making recipes that are just a main protein and then you also have to find recipes for a couple of sides to go with it. No! You don't even pay attention to recipes outside of your planning parameters because all they do is overwhelm you.

Other ideas for planning parameters. Maybe you want your teenage kids to cook dinner once or twice a week. That's why you meal plan, to get your kids in the kitchen more. If that's what you're planning for, what are your planning parameters? Basic recipes that teach techniques and how basic flavors go together. You might purchase the book *Salt Fat Acid Heat* that talks about the principles of creating delicious meals, or another favorite *Mad Hungry* which is about feeding families with a focus on the teenagers taking over the reins. Don't pull from the entire Internet or the entire cookbook section at Barnes and Noble. Knowing why you're meal planning and then choose at the most two planning parameters to help you fulfill that purpose. Ignore everything else.

Another example. The reason you meal plan is because you want to give priority to trying new foods and flavors and recipes from other cultures. If you're going to spend the time cooking outside of your brainless crowdpleasers, you want the meal to be something exciting and adventurous, so your planning parameters are simple. Choose recipes that have an ingredient you don't often use or are from another culture. If that's the case, ignore Paula Dean. Ignore *The Pioneer Woman*. Ignore your grandmother's collection of recipes from the 50s. You don't have to ignore them forever, but for right now, if you're planning, it's for a reason. Choose parameters that help you move toward that reason and silence everything else that makes you feel crazy.

For me, if my reason for meal planning is to not feel crazy, my two planning parameters are one) choose recipes that require no more than two pots to make and two) choose recipes that only use a basic list of ingredients. By not using more than two pots, I'm cutting down on my post-dinner cleanup massively. Have you ever watched cooking shows where everything is prepped in those beautiful glass bowls and I'm always like who is washing those? That's so many dishes! Not in my house. And my other planning parameter is that if a recipe requires an ingredient I don't usually buy, I don't make it. That sounds harsh, but there you have it. We only buy a few cuts of meat - meatballs, salmon filets, a few cuts of chicken but not all of them, ground pork,

ground beef, and big cuts of both pork and beef that are tough and need to be cooked slowly. I don't buy steak, shrimp, any fish other than salmon, chicken tenderloins, whole chickens, pork chops... I just don't even look at them. For produce and pantry staples, it's the same way. If I cook from a select group of ingredients, I'm less likely to waste stuff, I know how to cook those ingredients and won't get stressed out by the unknown, and my grocery shopping process is mindless. So for example, I don't buy kale or artichokes. I like both. Both are delicious, but they don't fit the planning parameters I've set for my life right now. Eventually they'll be there, but in my world of wanting to stay sane, I have a short list of foods I cook and only cook those foods. If I'm flipping through a cookbook and I see a recipe for shrimp and artichokes over quinoa, none of which are on my current ingredient list, I'm skipping that recipe. I don't care how delicious it looks or probably is. It doesn't fit my planning parameters, and I'm limiting my decisions which is the hope.

That's your hope, too. Planning parameters limit your decisions, and isn't that the worst part of meal planning? You have to choose again. It's so annoying. This way, you're limiting your decisions, and it makes it much easier.

Speaking of limiting decisions, the final step in The Lazy Genius meal plan is to have a dinner queue. This is where you turn your brain on autopilot and bask in the beauty of decisions already made. A dinner queue is simply that - a queue of meals that fit your planning parameters. You have your list of brainless crowdpleasers. Also create a dinner of queue of new recipes to try that fit your planning parameters and only our planning parameters. These aren't someday recipes or maybe that'll work recipes. Don't put the recipe in your queue if it doesn't fit your purpose for planning in the first place. You can collect your dinner queue a few ways. You can just make a list on paper with the recipe, where you can find (like a cookbook page or website or Pinterest board), and maybe a note or two about the main ingredients or how long it'll take. You can organize your dinner queue digitally and have a Pinterest board or use Evernote or something similar. My favorite way though brings me to some super exciting news.

You guys. I put all of this information, this entire meal plan system into a physical book you can hold in your hands. I call it The Meal Plan because I'm incredibly creative at naming things. But what I've done is taken these steps plus even more helpful information and put it in the cutest, sturdiest, notebook you can imagine so you can write down all of this stuff in one place. There are pages for your brainless crowdpleasers, for your dinner queue, and then actual calendar pages to make your meal plans. I KNOW. There are also companion videos to help you get the most out of your Meal Plan book where I explain all the pages and give you ideas on what to put in them. I've been working on this for months and am so excited to tell you about it now! It's only available for this week, so go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/mealplan to get yours! There are two levels. The basic level gets you The Meal Plan book as a downloadable PDF, and it's over 100 pages, y'all, as well as the companion videos to get you started *and* a bonus class called The Essential Kitchen where I help you get your fridge, freezer, pantry, and everything else poised and ready to make you a meal planning rockstar based on what you need, not on what everyone else tells you to need. So that's just the basic level. The reason The Meal Plan is only available for this week and why I'm not making it open all the time is because of the VIP level. You get all the same things - the PDF, the videos, and The Essential Kitchen program plus The Meal Plan book IRL. You'll see a photo on the site when you go, but it's this beautiful black cover and the prettiest, sturdiest white pages you can write in. You can write all your stuff in this book, and have everything you need to make a meal plan in one place. If your house catches on fire and all the people you love get out, this is the one thing you'll want to save. And as the most

fun part of the VIP package in addition to the book is a private Facebook group where you can share meal plan ideas with other Lazy Geniuses and where I'll be twice a week for the first month of your using this system. I'll answer your questions, do live videos, and all the things. So if you're listening to this the week of September 24th, head to thelazygeniuscollective.com/mealplan right now to check it out. It's only available this week, and while I'm sure we'll make it available again, it won't be for awhile because of that awesome Facebook group and because we actually print meal plan books for you. And I can't wait for you to see them.

But if you start with a list of brainless crowdpleasers, if you know why you're meal planning in the first place, if you choose two planning parameters to limit the Internet's barrage of recipes, and if you create a dinner queue to pull from, you can meal plan in literal minutes. And not like twenty minutes. More like two. And if you get The Lazy Genius Meal Plan system, it'll all be ready and waiting for you in one place. I can't wait for you to start getting dinner on the table with less stress, fewer decisions, and a lot more fun. This is the way to meal plan, guys. I promise you. So head to thelazygeniuscollective.com/mealplan to get started.

That's it for today! I'll be live on Instagram this Thursday the 27th if you have any questions for me about The Meal Plan system. I'm more than happy to answer them. Thanks for listening, guys. I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Bye, guys!