

Big
Batch
Bash

It's 6 p.m., and there's nothing in your fridge but expired eggs and a tired tomato. Pizza again? Not necessarily. Why not plan a bulk cooking session with friends, then stockpile nutritious meals in the freezer?

Donna Schmidt, a professional home/office organizer based in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, did exactly that. After consulting the bulk-cooking-themed book *The Big Cook*, Schmidt and three friends planned 11 menu items, megashopped and spent five hours chopping, shredding cheese and browning meat. The next day, after eight hours of food-prepping, each woman left with 44 meals. "It's wonderful to have prepared meals in the freezer," says Schmidt.

Even if you don't have time for big-batch cooking, you can still create a few meals in advance. Jan Main, au-

thor of *The Best Freezer Cookbook*, offers these tips:

Choose freezer-friendly foods.

Stews, saucy dishes, soups and baked goods work well; eggs and potatoes don't. "Fresh herbs freeze like a dream," says Main. Just wash, dry, chop and package them in small containers. And to avoid a soggy meal of reheated pasta or rice, undercook these starches by a few minutes before giving them the deep-freeze.

Chill carefully. Air exposure in the freezer means deterioration in food taste, so wrap and seal meals well.

Organize your stash. "The biggest mistake people make is not organizing their freezer," says Main. Label and date meal containers. And group similar kinds of food together.

Defrost with care.

For safety's sake, food should thaw in the fridge, not on the counter. *Amy Baskin*

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