

Catering for the Covid-19 Crisis

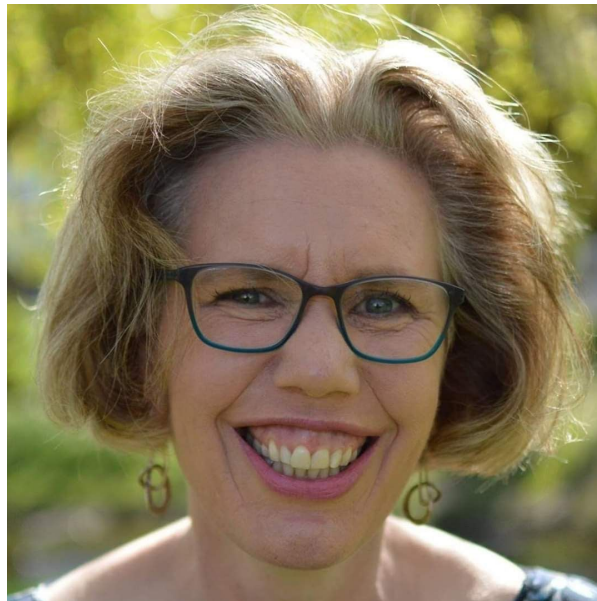
Easy Recipes to Make With Staples in the Cupboard



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Be The Person You Want To Be

About the Author



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Time is precious and it often seems that nutrition is less important than other aspects of life, so her aim is to help people realise that healthy living can be integrated into an ordinary schedule. Nutrition and exercise are crucial for personal development.

She offers talks, training, workshops and nutritional advice for a variety of audiences, with the content tailored to their particular needs.

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Introduction

In these unprecedented times, I wanted to offer some advice to help you make the best of the food you have and ensure that stress over food isn't added to other worries.

Knowing what to feed yourself and your children is a challenge at the best of times. Now normality has gone. Restaurants are shut. So are fast food outlets. If you are a reluctant cook then these next few weeks, dare I say months, might be difficult times. You might be finding your favourite recipes becoming repetitive. Your children might be fussy eaters unhappy eating food they are not used to.

As shops struggle to maintain supplies due to panic buying there is no guarantee that the food you need to make your favourite meals will be available.

If you are a confident cook then you may well relish the idea of being brave and trying new dishes. However the majority of people I talk to are not and many are struggling to know what to cook. This is why jars of pasta sauce and curries have flown off the shelves. They are the easy option. However these are full of calories and are best avoided or at least eaten in moderation.

Try to use this time as a way to experiment with new recipes and try new foods. If you have children, get them involved with the cooking. You may be surprised at what foods they learn to enjoy. Remember, they learn from you so you have to be positive and eat new foods too.

A Range of Staples

If possible try and have a range of staples in your cupboard as this will enable you to make meals without having to worry about what is in the supermarket. This is not to advocate panic buying! Just be savvy about what you have in your cupboard and ways that simple easy and cheap meals can be made.

What's the Idea?

The simple idea is to have a basic range of dry ingredients in your cupboard that won't go off and yet will enable you to cook a simple meal all by themselves. If you cannot find everything you want, try looking at other foods you would not normally buy and be imaginative.

If possible, buy some key ingredients like chicken, fish, sausages, mince, a cut of meat perhaps, some fresh vegetables. The idea is that you have the other ingredients amongst your staples so you can turn these key ingredients into fully rounded meals.

If it is not possible to find these key ingredients, don't worry. There are meals that can be prepared using the staples alone. They are just as healthy and nutritious.

Most staples will be dry or tinned ingredients so don't worry about best before dates too much. These indicate quality not safety. Use your common sense with these dates and treat them as advisory.

The key ingredients will be fresh ingredients and will have use by dates. These indicate when a product may no longer be safe to eat. You should not eat, cook, or freeze it after the date displayed, even if it looks or smells fine.

You don't have to be super-organised. You don't have to pre-prepare menus and shopping lists. Just go to the supermarket knowing what staples you have run out of and look out for some tasty looking special offers, or whatever inspires you, for your key ingredients.

If inspiration fails you or the supermarket shelves are empty, then don't worry, you will always be able to manage a few meals from what's in your staples cupboard.

Don't worry if you don't have a key ingredient for a meal for every day of the week. Buy a few things for a few days and let the staples take the strain the rest of the time.

What This Book Does

This book provides you with a list of staples that are really useful to have in the kitchen. Please come up with some of your own and develop recipes of your own. This book is supposed to give you an idea of where to start. It isn't a book of detailed recipes it is designed to give you an idea where to start.

The meals that I'm suggesting are quick and easy, designed to take the strain out of everyday cooking, so you don't need to resort to takeaways or ready-meals. These meals are easily adapted to be more adventurous - please do so whenever you feel like it - but for now we are going to focus on the basics and start with a set of staples for a simple range of meals.

What Are Staples?

Staples are things you can have in your kitchen cupboard (fridge and freezer included) that can be used for a wide variety of meals. They are things that last a long time, so you don't have to worry about use-by-dates (within reason anyway). They are things that you aren't buying for one specific meal but just to have in the cupboard for when they come in useful.

Here are some broad categories to give you some ideas.

Remember tinned foods are hard to get at the moment, but sanity will return and they will be back on shelves when people who haven't read this book realise they don't know what to do with them and stop buying them.

In the Cupboard

- Pasta
- Tofu
- Rice
- Couscous
- Buckwheat
- Quinoa
- Lentils
- Polenta
- Flour
- Baking powder
- Tinned beans - kidney beans, cannellini beans, butter beans, black-eyed beans
- Tinned chick peas
- Tinned sweetcorn
- Tinned tomatoes - chopped to save the bother
- Tinned fish - tuna, salmon, sardines, sild, mackerel
- Tinned coconut milk
- Tomato Puree
- Spices: curry powder, chilli powder, black pepper
- Mixed Herbs
- Stock cubes - chicken, vegetable and fish all help add flavour.
- Oil - sunflower or rapeseed oil are the most versatile
- Vinegar - white wine or cider vinegar tend to be more useful than typical malt vinegar
- Mustard - English or French, as you prefer, so useful for boosting flavours
- Mixed nuts - uncooked, unsalted (from the baking section not the snack section)
- Sauce bottles - soy, worcester, tabasco, useful for boosting flavours
- Eggs - keep for a reasonable time - so useful you'll be using them all the time

In the Fridge

Although they don't meet the definition of staples because they are short life, there are things that every home gets through so quickly that they will almost always be in the fridge:

- Milk (or this can easily be long life milk, nut or soya based)
- Butter
- Cheese

If fresh vegetables are available these can be added to many different meals that they could be considered as staples repertoire. Keep a continual supply topped up when you go shopping. These all last for a reasonable time, longer than the sell-by-date which is for the supermarkets benefit.

Try a selection, even some that you may not have cooked with before

- Leeks, wash them first and then cut finely, very versatile and great with everything.
- Courgettes, leave the skin on, slice or grate, add to all sorts of things Carrots, wash and leave the skin on, slice or grate and add to everything
- Peppers, add colour and flavour to all sorts of recipes
- Onions, the basic flavouring to so many recipes
- Aubergine, cover in salt for half an hour and rinse, great baked, fried, added to curries or stews
- Fennel - great in stews, soups, pasta bake, roasted veg..
- Butternut squash, great in a curry, soup in a dhal,
- Sweet potato, mix with spinach to make a curry, make a soup, eat on its own

In the Freezer

Again not strictly staples but because they do the job here are some things that are great to put in the freezer and arguably taste nicer than their tinned alternatives.

- Garden peas, great added to anything - risottos, quiches, casseroles or on their own
- Mixed vegetables, added to stews, omelettes, macaroni cheese, dhals, blended with a tin of tomatoes to make a sauce or on their own
- Spinach, added to dhals, omelettes, vegetarian dishes, stews and curries
- Oven-roast vegetables (or you can easily make your own)
- Broccoli and cauliflower, make into a pasta bake, curry or homemade soup
- Carrots, added to risotto, stews, bolognese
- Onions as per fresh can be used as a base for so many recipes
- Peppers, great in soups, tomato sauce, quiches
- Any other veg that takes your fancy
- You can buy frozen herbs and spices, or make your own frozen from fresh.

A Quick Mention of Potatoes

If you like potatoes and get through them at a reasonable rate then you can regard them as part of your staples repertoire, since they keep a reasonable amount of time and don't need to be refrigerated, just kept somewhere cool (a bit like eggs really).

They can fit into any meal where carbohydrates like rice and pasta do. However because they do go off within a week or so and need a bit of management they have not been included in the “staples” covered by this book.

Basic Kitchen Equipment

If you have a well equipped kitchen you will already have all you need to follow the recipe ideas in this book. However if you are just starting out, here is a list of things to acquire:

- Sharp knives - small knife, big chopping knife and a bread knife are all you need
- Chopping board
- Frying pan
- Saucepans - large, medium and small.
- Ovenware dish - the right size for your household
- Wooden spoon - or two or three
- Mixing bowl
- Whisk
- Grater
- Electric stick blender

What to Cook - Some Quick Ideas

- Tinned beans - experiment with all the varieties and use your favourites in currys, chillies, casseroles, salads or added to couscous.
- Tinned tomatoes - use for sauces, bolognese, casseroles, stews
- Tomato puree - great for that tomato flavour boost
- Lentils (tinned and dry) - make a dhal, add to a casseroles, add to soups - provide body and texture, healthy protein and carbs.
- Tinned fish - tuna, sardines, mackerel./sild - make fish cakes (with mashed potatoes or cannellini beans), have on toast, add to a jacket potato.
- Pasta - have with simple sauce, make a pasta bake, lasagne, macaroni cheese, even just with butter, pepper and grated cheese.
- Couscous - use as a quick carb to accompany a meal, add oven roast veggies and cashew nuts to make a couscous salad
- Polenta - try polenta waffles or fried polenta cakes. These can be made by cooking the polenta, waiting for it to cool, then shaping into patties. Experiment adding grated cheese, herbs, spices, fried onions finely chopped, cooked spinach
- Rice - an obvious carb to accompany a meal, but cold with sultanas, almonds could make a salad.
- Mixed Nuts - use to make a nut roast, or vegetarian "meat" balls
- Eggs - scrambled, fried, poached, omelette or with flour, sugar, milk etc to make pancakes, waffles, cakes
- Pancake/waffle mixture is 200ml milk, 100ml water, 2 eggs, 100g flour, blended together.
- Yorkshire puddings use the same mixture. Use a muffin tin or tart trays and put a little oil in each. Put in the oven until really hot then pour the mixture in and bake at the highest temperature for 20 mins.
- Frozen mixed veg - an accompaniment to many meals, also add to casserole sauces, chillies, macaroni cheese, omelettes.
- Frozen roasted vegetables - great flavour as the basis for sauces, add to omelettes, couscous salad, rice salad; puree with a tin of tomatoes to make a yummy passata style sauce
- Frozen broccoli and cauliflower - roast with a little oil and seasoning or spices to create an accompaniment with a different taste.
- Freeze leftover grated Cheddar cheese in small freezer bags (Cheddar is the only cheese that freezes really well) to have a ready supply of cheese for cooking amongst your staples.
- Milk can be frozen in ice cube trays, then stored in freezer bags, turning it into a frozen staple.

What to Cook - More Detail

You will see that there are simple ways that you can put together meals using a variety of the simple staples you have in the cupboard. I am sure that you will have fun experimenting and develop your own yummy recipes. You may also discover some new staples to add to your list.

From the staples list you may well be thinking that you could not make any meals or maybe one or two - In fact there are so many combinations it is difficult to know where to start.

In this short booklet I have listed a few thoughts although there are so many more that I could mention, hopefully I have given you a few thoughts.

If you are vegan then there are ways that you can adapt your meals using egg replacement and replacing butter for oil and using nutritional yeast in place of cheese.

If you are gluten free then there are other flours that you can use, that can be adapted to recipes

Some Basics

First some simple recipes of things to make that will form the foundations to many meals.

Please note, I am not a strict one for quantities. Very few things need strict ratios of one ingredient to another. Far better to chuck things in and learn to judge quantities as you go along. Quicker and more fun. If things get too thick or too thin they can always be rescued quite easily!

White Sauce

Ingredients

- ½ pint milk (this can be any kind of milk not just cows, soya, cashew, almond,oat...)
- 1 tbsp plain flour or self raising if need be
- 1 tbsp butter

Method

- In a saucepan add the milk the butter and the flour.
- To make into a cheese sauce add grated cheese and maybe black pepper and a hint of mustard

What you can use this sauce for:

- A base for macaroni cheese
- A topping for a lasagne
- A sauce for the topping of baked pancakes or lasgane
- A sauce to add some veggies to and bake in pastry as a pie
- A sauce for a fish pie

Tomato Sauce

Make a simple tomato sauce, cramming in a selection of veggies to help you to get your five portions a day!

Ingredients:

- Tin of tomatoes
- Frozen veg, a selection
- Herbs or spices
- Tomato puree (not necessary but a nice extra)
- Stock cube (not necessary but a nice extra)

Method:

- Into a saucepan add a tin of tomatoes, a handful of frozen veggies including some roughly chopped onions, if you have them, and a squeeze of tomato puree.
- For more flavour add herbs and spices, such as mixed herbs, black pepper, a pinch of salt ginger and/or garlic.
- Simmer for around half an hour and then blitz with a hand blender.

What you can use this sauce for:

- A base for a pizza (simmer for longer to thicken more than usual)
- A pasta sauce
- A sauce for a bolognese or a chilli
- A sauce for a chicken casserole
- A sauce to go with fish fingers or chicken nuggets (home made of course!)

If you make a big batch, then divide into tupperware containers and either keep in the fridge for a few days, or freeze.

Shortcrust Pastry

So useful and versatile and easy, opening up the world of homemade pies, quiches, tarts and more.

Top tip: Ratios do matter here: always half the amount of fat to flour

Ingredients

- 200g flour,
- 100g butter/stork
- Cold water to bind

Method

- Mix the flour and butter until they resemble breadcrumbs
- Add COLD water only a little until the mixture binds together, better wetter than drier
- If you have time let it 'rest' covered in fridge. If you don't have time no worries!
- Use flour to roll out the pastry so it does not stick

What you can use this pastry for:

- Make a quiche and mini quiches
- Pies; chicken, fish

- Rolled pie - place the mixture in the pastry and with a t-towel underneath roll the pastry - like as a swiss roll
- Mince pies , jam tarts

Basic Dough

Flour and water must be one of the most versatile combinations ever. This basic dough with no worry about using yeast can be used for:

- Pizza
- Naans
- Tortillas
- Scones

Pizza Bases

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup water
- Pinch of flour
- A dash of oil

Method:

- Mix all the ingredients together and give a good pummeling.
- Roll out to the shape you need.
- For pizza base, pre-cook at the hottest temperature your oven will go for 5 mins until the base is firm **then** add the sauce and toppings and bake again for 10 mins or until done
- For tortillas toast in a hot dry frying pan until bubbled, then turn over and cook the other side until slightly singed
- For naans bake in the oven until ever-so-slightly brown.

Top Tip For a Staples Pizza

- Use the tomato sauce described above as the base
- Add plenty of frozen grated cheese
- Tinned pineapple
- Tinned tuna

Tortillas

Ingredients

- 2 cups plain flour
- ¾ cup water
- Pinch of salt
- Tbsp oil, ideally olive oil but it doesn't matter

Method

- Combine all ingredients and give a good pummeling!
- Roll out into a circle the size of your frying pan and using a tiny bit of oil fry quickly until browned.

What to use these tortillas for

- As wraps - simply add your favourite filling and fold over

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- As nachos - cut the tortilla into triangles and fry or bake until crispy - cover with tinned beans in your cupboard, a little tomato sauce and cheese - put back in the oven to heat through and melt the cheese.
- As enchiladas - spread fillings of your choice over the tortillas, rollup like pancakes and then cover with a white sauce or tomato sauce. Top with grated cheese. Bake for around 15 mins
- As an alternative to lasagne

Naan Bread

Bread making is a great way to introduce the children to cooking. Since naan bread doesn't need any yeast it is an easy one to make.

Ingredients

- 250g self-raising flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 3 tbsp milk or yoghurt

Method

- Put the flour in a mixing bowl. Add the salt.
- Add the oil and the milk and mix it all together. If the mixture is too wet add more flour; if it is too dry add more milk.
- Leave to rest for about 5 - 10 minutes.
- Form into large flat tear-drop shapes.
- Cook on a dry frying pan turning over when golden brown on each side
- Alternatively place on a baking sheet in the oven and cook at Gas 4/180C/350F for 5 to 10 mins.

Options

You can make the naans more interesting by adding flavourings. Try adding desiccated coconut, raisins and ground almonds to make a Peshwari Naan. Sprinkle on the flavourings just before folding the naans into their final shape so the flavourings are trapped inside.

Pasta Dishes

All sorts of dishes can be made with pasta. It is such a versatile ingredient and so easy to cook. It can even be eaten quite happily on its own with a little salt, pepper, butter and grated cheese.

Very Simple Pasta

Ingredients

- Pasta
- 1 Tin Tomatoes
- Mixed vegetables (optional, whatever you fancy)
- Mixed herbs

Method

- Cook the pasta
- Heat the tomatoes, vegetables, herbs
- Serve with the sauce on the drained pasta or all mixed together!

Carbonara

Ingredients

- Pasta
- 1 Egg
- Grated cheese
- Pancetta, ham, chorizo, bacon (traditional, but optional really)

Method

- Cook the pasta
- Fry the pancetta (if using)
- Drain the pasta, but leave quite wet (this prevents the egg from scrambling)
- Add the pancetta and stir
- Add the egg and stir
- Garnish with the grated cheese

Pasta Bake

Ingredients:

- Pasta
- Tomato sauce (see recipe above)
- Tinned tuna or other fish (optional)
- Mixed vegetables (if using fresh, pre-fry them until soft)
- Grated cheese

Method

- Cook the pasta
- Make the **tomato sauce**

- Mix pasta, tuna, sauce, vegetables together
- Sprinkle cheese on top to make an even, continuous layer.
- Bake for 20 mins at 180 or gas 4

Macaroni Cheese

Ingredients

- Pasta
- White sauce (see recipe above)
- Mixed vegetables (optional but makes the dish healthier)
- Grated cheese
- Seasonings, perhaps mustard to give the dish some oomph.

Method

- Cook the pasta
- Make the **white sauce**
- Add the grated cheese to the finished white sauce
- Add the pasta, veggies, seasonings to the sauce and mix together
- Bake in the oven for 20 mins 180 or gas 4

Cooking with Nuts

Nut Roast

Ingredients

- Mixed nuts
- Breadcrumbs - these can be made from fresh, stale or frozen bread
- Onions
- Mixed vegetables (peppers, carrots, spinach, tomatoes)
- 1 Egg
- Seasonings, herbs

Method

- Fry the onions and add vegetables and fry until softened.
- Mix all together with the nuts and breadcrumbs
- Add herbs and seasoning.
- Bind together with an egg.
- Place the mixture into an ovenproof dish and bake for 20 mins 180 or gas 4

Options

To make nut rissoles or meatless meatballs, make the same recipe as for nut roast but instead of baking in the oven make into small balls. Make up a tomato sauce (see recipe above). Fry the balls briefly to slightly brown them and then add to the tomato sauce while it heats through. Serve with rice or pasta.

Using Lentils

Lentils are a very versatile food, providing carbohydrate and protein in a healthy way. They can be added to all sorts of dishes to provide texture and nutrition. They can be used in many recipes where you would otherwise use beef mince: chillies, bologneses and so on. Here are some recipes where the lentils are the key ingredient.

Spinach, Sweet Potato & Lentil Dhal

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp oil
- Ideally use the following but if you don't have any or enough don't worry - be inventive you just need a little flavour!
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- Thumb-sized piece ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
- 1 ½ tsp ground turmeric
- 1 ½ tsp ground cumin
- 2 sweet potatoes (about 400g/14oz), cut into even chunks
- 250g red split lentils, washed well
- 600ml vegetable stock
- 80g bag of frozen spinach

Method

- Heat the oil in a wide-based pan with a tight-fitting lid. Add the onion and cook over a low heat for 10 mins, stirring occasionally, until softened.
- Add the garlic, ginger and chilli, cook for 1 min
- Add the spices and cook for 1 min more.
- Turn up the heat to medium, add the sweet potato and stir everything together so the potato is coated in the spice mixture.
- Tip in the lentils, stock and some seasoning.
- Bring the liquid to the boil, then reduce the heat, cover and cook for 20 mins until the lentils are tender and the potato is just holding its shape
- Taste and adjust the seasoning, then gently stir in the spinach. Once wilted, top with the spring onions and basil to serve.

Lentil Moussaka

Ingredients

- 2 aubergines
- 2 cups red lentils, Make sure they are washed and rinsed or a tin of green lentils
- Any frozen, fresh or tinned veggie.
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- 2 tins of water (use the empty tomato tin)
- Big squeeze of tomato puree
- 1 vegetable stock cube

- **White sauce** (see the recipe above)

Seasoning

- Salt, pepper, cinnamon, really any seasonings you like to give flavour

Method

- Slice the aubergines into thin slices and cover with salt
- Cut the pepper and carrot into small cubes and place in a pot with the lentils, tomatoes and seasonings.
- Cover with water and bring to the boil - should achieve a thickish consistency - thin by adding more water - thicken by boiling for longer and reducing down.
- Rinse the aubergine and pat dry with kitchen roll.
- Fry the aubergine in a hot frying pan until slightly charred. Despite, salting and rinsing the aubergine still absorbed alot of oil, so I did not use any
- Prepare the white sauce (see recipe)

Put the Moussaka together

- Place a layer of the sauce at the bottom of a pie dish, then a layer of aubergines.
- Repeat the layers..
- Finish by pouring over the white sauce
- Bake at gas 4 or 160 for around 30 - 40mins.

Options

Use lasagne pasta or tortillas instead of the aubergines to create something more like a lasagne dish.

Lentil Bolognese

Ingredients

- 1 can green lentils
- As many different veggies as possible
- Big squeeze of tomato puree
- 1 vegetable stock cube
- Seasonings; mixed herbs, fennel seeds, black pepper, paprika

Method

- Mix everything together and cook until everything is cooked and a thick consistency.
- Serve with pasta or rice.

Lentil Chilli

Ingredients

- 1-2 Tins beans (choose your favourite selection)
- 1 Tin lentils
- 1 Tin of Tomatoes
- 2 tsp Chilli powder
- Mixed vegetables (optional)
- Vegetable stock cube
- Tomato puree
- Worcester sauce (optional)

Method

- Place beans, tomatoes, lentils, chilli powder and stock cube in a saucepan and simmer for 30 mins.
- Add vegetables.
- Add a dash of worcester sauce and a good squeeze of tomato puree.

Other Tinned Ideas

Tuna Fish Cakes

Ingredients

- 1 Tin of Tuna
- 1 Tin of cannellini beans
- Mixed vegetables - you want small pieces, so chop finely if necessary
- Seasonings - salt, pepper, herbs.

Method

- Fry vegetables gently until soft
- Mash the beans using a fork
- Mix the seasonings, vegetables, beans and tuna together.
- Place the mixture into your hands and make into small patties.
- If the mixture seems a little wet, then have a plate with some flour and gently coat the fish cakes.
- Fry in a little oil until hot and slightly crispy.

Options

Serve with a tomato sauce (see recipe), plain rice or pasta.

Tomato and Chickpea Curry

As with many of these recipes, this is just a guideline to give you ideas. If you don't have all the spices don't worry, use what you have and be inventive. A good curry powder can replace them all

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 Onions finely sliced
- 2 Garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 Tin of Tomatoes
- Tomato puree
- Vegetable stock cube
- 1 Tin of Chickpeas, drained and rinsed

Spices

- 1 tsp Garam Masala
- 1 tsp Turmeric
- 1 tsp Ground coriander

Method

- Heat the oil in a large pan
- Cook the onions until softened, about 10 mins
- Add the garlic and spices, and stir to combine for 1-2 mins
- Pour in the canned tomatoes and add stock cube and simmer for 10 mins.
- Add the chickpeas and heat through.