



PART 1: GETTING STARTED

5 BASIC STRATEGIES FOR TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR KITCHEN

It seems fitting to begin this Part 1 with the story of my friend Jann. When I first met her, what Jann wanted most from the kitchen was to *not* be there! Every night she dragged herself into the kitchen, convinced that she couldn't cook and what's more, that she hated to cook. Most nights, she had no idea what to fix for her family, so of course she ended up making the same few dishes night after night, and they tasted about as flat and uninspired as she felt.

Imagine my surprise then, when Jann phoned one day to talk about how much fun she was having in the kitchen. It seems that she had gradually begun to adopt a few of the KitchenSmart strategies—gathering meal ideas here and there, using them to plan a few meals, and then making and shopping with a list. Suddenly, she found herself cooking meals that were not only great tasting and healthy, but also refreshingly creative as she gained the confidence to experiment a little and try some new dishes.

What Jann had experienced was a bit of the KitchenSmart "magic" described in the Introduction—the same thing you will experience as you begin adopting the KitchenSmart strategies. To get started, this Part I will help you put a basic KitchenSmart program into place with five activities that correspond to the five main meal-making areas identified in the Introduction:

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- Chapter 1's activity will help you scout out a few good meal ideas and create a simple **meal idea list**.
- In Chapter 2 you will prepare a one-to-two day **meal plan** using a couple of the entrees from your meal idea list.
- Making a quick **shopping list** for your meal plan is the focus of Chapter 3.
- Chapter 4 will help you get the basic **kitchen tools** needed for entry level cooking.
- Finally, in Chapter 5 you will assemble a beginning **pantry** by stocking the staples called for by the recipes in your meal idea list.

With these five easy strategies in place, you will be well on the way to taking control and achieving your heart's desire in the kitchen.



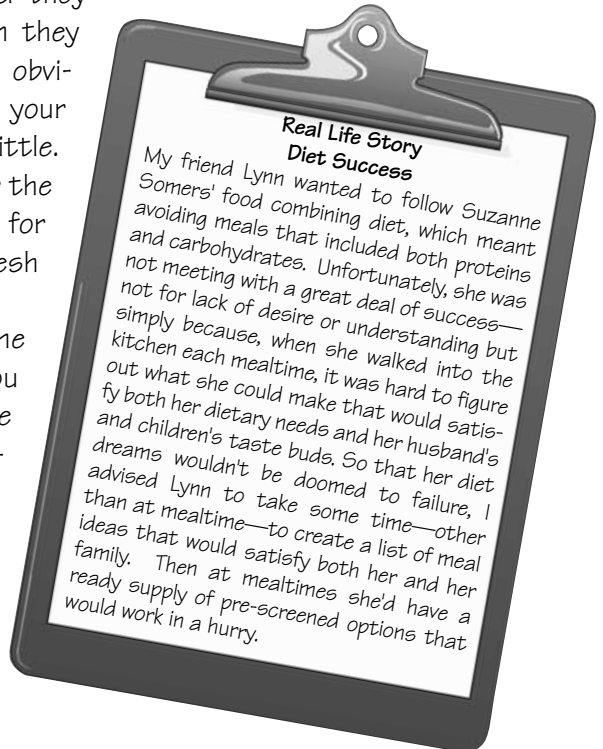
CHAPTER 1:

MAKING A MEAL IDEA LIST

"Are we having tuna casserole again?"

Boredom has got to be one of the biggest barriers we face when it comes to making the kitchen and mealtimes more enjoyable. Like my friend Jann, we tend to cook the same few dishes night after night, and they are no more fun to eat than they are to make. The solution is obvious: Put a little pizzazz into your meals and mix things up a little. Pour a Thai peanut sauce over the pasta, try a vegetarian dish for dinner, maybe throw some fresh herbs into the green salad!

Spicing up your mealtime routine is easy enough if you think ahead. The creative side of your brain will readily contribute to your efforts if it isn't forced to operate under the pressure of last minute decision-making. So right now, when you *aren't* under the gun, take a minute to assemble a "meal idea list"



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that includes a few new and interesting meal ideas. Then, when mealtimes roll around, you'll have a ready source of inspiration.

Don't think that "new and interesting" is the same as "elaborate, gourmet and time-consuming," though. There are hundreds of quick and easy ways to perk up your meals, from sprinkling your sautéed spinach with balsamic vinegar to making your rice pilaf style. The Side Dish Guide in Appendix B, has dozens of suggestions like these and you will undoubtedly discover many more as you begin scouting out meal ideas with easy and interesting in mind.

Besides helping us beat boredom at the dinner table, making a meal idea list has many other benefits. Let's say, for instance, that you are following a particular weight-loss diet, you're allergic to certain foods, or you need to be more budget conscious at the grocery store. Whatever your situation or problem, the solution is simple: sit down in a quiet space of time, look through your recipe resources and assemble a list of meal ideas that meets your needs and desires—which is exactly what you'll do in this chapter.

The KitchenSmart Strategy for Beating Boredom at the Dinner Table

● Make a Meal Idea List

Use the Meal Idea List Worksheet at the end of this chapter to make a meal idea list that will inspire your meal making efforts. The sample Meal Idea List on page 14 shows how.

- If you don't have any cookbooks or recipes to choose from, hop on the Internet or buy a couple of recipe books or magazines to get started.
- When selecting ideas, be sure to choose ones that you really *could and would make tonight*. Also, don't think you must come up with all new ideas. It's fine—and actually advisable—to include a few familiar standbys to balance things out.
- Expect to spend anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes making a list—longer if you enjoy browsing through cookbooks and thinking about recipes.

MAKING A MEAL IDEA LIST 1-2-3



...AND NOW YOU HAVE A READY SUPPLY OF INTERESTING AND WORKABLE MEAL OPTIONS FOR ANY NIGHT OF THE WEEK

Tips and Pointers

ANYTHING GOES

There is a reason why the worksheet for this exercise is called a "Meal Idea" List rather than a "Recipe" List. It is called a Meal Idea List so you will feel free to write down any kind of meal suggestion that works for you, whether it's an actual, written recipe or something like a healthy take out dish, a combination of nutritious convenience foods or a single ingredient dish like steamed broccoli. On the sample Meal Idea List, for example, you will see that a takeout order of chicken soup and a frozen rice entrée are featured right alongside a recipe for "Pasta with Spinach Pesto." At first, of course, it might seem a little odd to write down things as simple as "chicken soup from the XYZ local deli." However, with all the available food options these days, it is too easy to forget a good meal idea when you're under the gun to get something on the table. Having a written reminder is how you make sure these good ideas actually make it onto your table.