

A Guide to Meal Planning and Grocery Shopping

(Budget-Friendly, Microwave-Only)



How to Use This Guide

Start by reviewing the **Smart Shopping Tips & Barracks Hacks** at the top to set you up for budget-friendly, healthy choices and easier day-to-day eating in the barracks. Then look over the **Simple Meal Formulas**, which are the core of the guide. Choose which formulas you want to use for the week and how much variety you want.

Use the **companion planning template** to pick your proteins, grains, veggies, sauces, and snacks based on the formulas you selected. Then build your grocery list using the food ideas in each commissary section. The examples are just starting points, so swap in whatever you like.

Check the **Healthy Snack Ideas** to round out your week with quick, nutritious options, then head to the store. After shopping, use the **Microwave-Only Meal Ideas** to turn your chosen formulas into simple, fast meals all week long!

Smart Shopping Tips

- Check ingredient labels for added sugar and high sodium.
- Choose “**low sodium,**” “**no sugar added,**” or **store-brand** options whenever possible.
- Frozen and canned produce can be just as nutritious as fresh (and often cheaper).
- The foods listed in this guide are **just examples**. The **meal formulas** are what matter most — mix, match, and explore a wide variety of proteins, grains, veggies, and sauces.

Barracks Hacks

- Buy **bulk frozen veggies** and portion them yourself to save money.
- Eggs are one of the **cheapest, most versatile proteins** and microwave easily.
- Rotate proteins like beans, chicken, tuna, and fish to keep meals varied without overspending.
- Keep **seasonings and sauces** on hand — they make simple meals taste different every day.
- Meal-prep **2–3 days at a time** using microwave-safe containers to stay consistent.
- Portion snacks ahead of time so they last longer and help avoid overeating.

Simple Meal Formulas

These formulas make meal assembly fast, cheap, and foolproof. Plug in whatever ingredients you have — the possibilities are endless

1. Grain + Protein + Veggie

- **Grains:** rice packs, quinoa cups, microwave potatoes
- **Proteins:** canned beans, chicken strips, tuna, eggs
- **Veggies:** frozen broccoli, spinach, mixed veggies

Example: Brown rice + diced chicken + broccoli + hot sauce

2. Noodle + Protein + Veggie

- **Noodles:** microwave ramen, instant noodles, pasta cups
- **Proteins:** egg, tuna, chicken strips
- **Veggies:** frozen stir-fry mix, spinach

Example: Ramen (drained) + egg + veggies + soy sauce

3. Wrap + Protein + Veggie + Sauce

- **Wraps:** whole-grain tortillas
- **Proteins:** beans, tuna, chicken
- **Veggies:** spinach, corn, tomatoes
- **Sauces:** salsa, hot sauce, hummus

Example: Tortilla + black beans + spinach + salsa

4. Potato + Protein + Topping

- **Potato:** microwave sweet potato or russet
- **Proteins:** beans, cottage cheese, chicken
- **Toppings:** salsa, cheese, hot sauce

Example: Sweet potato + black beans + cheese

5. Bowl Formula (Protein + Fiber + Flavor)

- **Protein:** tuna, chickpeas, eggs
- **Fiber:** rice, oats, veggies
- **Flavor:** seasoning + sauce

Example: Chickpeas + rice + Italian seasoning + olive oil

6. Breakfast Formula: Base + Fruit + Fat

- **Base:** yogurt, oatmeal, cottage cheese
- **Fruit:** banana, berries, apples
- **Fat:** peanut butter, nuts, seeds

Example: Oatmeal + frozen berries + peanut butter

Navigating the Commissary

Freezer Section

- Frozen chicken strips or diced chicken
- Frozen turkey or beef strips
- Frozen tilapia fillets
- Frozen broccoli, spinach, mixed vegetables
- Microwave-ready potatoes or sweet potatoes
- Frozen stir-fry blends
- Frozen fruit blends

Canned & Shelf-Stable

- Canned beans (black, chickpeas, lentils)
- Canned corn, green beans, diced tomatoes
- Canned tuna, salmon, or chicken
- Instant oatmeal or bulk oats
- Microwavable rice packs
- Natural peanut butter
- Bulk nuts
- Seasonings: garlic powder, chili flakes, Italian blend, salt, pepper
- Hot sauce, soy sauce, salsa
- Shelf-stable hummus cups
- Whole-grain crackers
- Shelf-stable almond/soy milk

Dairy & Cold

- Greek yogurt (large tub)
- Cottage cheese
- Pre-cooked hard-boiled eggs
- Shredded cheese
- String cheese

Minimal Fresh Produce

- Bananas
- Apples
- Frozen berries
- Pre-washed salad greens
- Baby carrots
- Grapes (freeze for snacks)
- Cherry tomatoes

Snack Foods

- Mixed nuts
- Air-popped popcorn
- Protein bars (check added sugars)
- Granola
- Trail mix
- Rice cakes
- Whole-grain crackers
- Applesauce cups
- Beef jerky (low sodium)
- Dark chocolate squares
- Tuna packets
- Hummus cups + pretzels
- Dried fruit
- Roasted chickpeas
- Cottage cheese cups
- Greek yogurt drink

Healthy, Fast Snack Ideas

Protein-Focused

- Tuna packet + crackers
- Cottage cheese + seasoning
- Greek yogurt + berries
- Hard-boiled eggs + hot sauce
- Peanut butter on rice cakes
- Jerky + fruit

Carb + Protein Combos

- Banana + peanut butter
- Apple + string cheese
- Oatmeal cup + peanut butter
- Popcorn + nuts
- Rice cake + cottage cheese

Sweet & Healthy

- Frozen grapes
- Applesauce + granola
- Dark chocolate + almonds
- Greek yogurt + honey
- Dried fruit + walnuts

Savory & Filling

- Hummus + carrots
- Roasted chickpeas
- Pickles + cheese stick
- Olives + crackers
- Microwave edamame

Microwave-Only Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Oatmeal + berries + peanut butter
- Microwave scrambled eggs + spinach
- Greek yogurt + granola + banana
- Cottage cheese + fruit + cinnamon
- Egg + cheese tortilla wrap

Lunch/Dinner Bases

- Rice + chicken + broccoli
- Sweet potato + black beans + salsa
- Tilapia steam bag + veggies + rice
- Ramen + veggies + egg
- Canned chili + rice + cheese

Wraps & Bowls

- Tortilla + beans + corn + cheese
- Rice bowl + chickpeas + spinach
- Tuna wrap + spinach + hot sauce
- Burrito bowl: rice + beans + salsa
- Mediterranean bowl: rice + olives + hummus