

Making Everything Easier!™

7-Day Menu Planner FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Make easy meals that are delicious and nutritious
- Create your own menu plans
- Prepare meals the whole family will enjoy in approximately 30 minutes

Susan Nicholson, RD/LD

Registered dietitian and creator of the
7-Day Menu Planner newspaper column



7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies®

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by Susan Nicholson, RD/LD



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About the Author

Susan Nicholson is a columnist, speaker, cookbook author, and consultant in the area of food and nutrition. Her weekly syndicated column from Universal Uclick, “The 7-Day Menu Planner,” is a practical, quick, healthy eating guide for budget-minded families. Nicholson’s columns appear in newspapers with total circulations of more than 6 million.

Known for her humorous, down-to-earth style and creative, healthy recipes, Nicholson has appeared more than 125 times on Atlanta network television and on CNN and The Discovery Channel. She also has participated in many radio and newspaper interviews.

“The 7-Day Menu Planner” began in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 1995. Before Nicholson began writing the column, she owned and operated a microwave specialty store and cooking school. She attended La Varenne Ecole de Cuisine in Paris. Her book, *Save Your Heart with Susan — Six Easy Steps to Cooking Delicious Healthy Meals in a Microwave*, was published in January 1991 (William Morrow & Co.).

Prior to her full-time culinary endeavors, Nicholson held regional sales positions with Mead Johnson’s Nutritional Division and the former Marriott Corp.’s Contract Food Services Division.

Nicholson is a registered and licensed dietitian and a member of the American Dietetic Association and the International Association of Culinary Professionals. She is a member of the Association of Food Journalists. Nicholson also is a founding member and past president of the Atlanta chapter of Les Dames d’Escoffier.

Nicholson is a native of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and now lives in Atlanta.

For musings, misadventures, and more from Susan, visit the Making the Menu blog at www.makingthemenue.com, and find more menus at www.7daymenuplanner.com. Follow Susan on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/7DayMenu>.

Dedication

To my family here on earth, Nick, also known as Cupcake and the Virgo, and our

four-legged “children,” Smoke and Flash, feline brothers who are destined to rule the universe.

And to my mother, Mary Rupp Orebaugh, the woman who taught me more than anyone, in and out of the kitchen. I wish she were here on earth to read this book. It would make her laugh. And, to our first four-legged “children,” Magnolia Blossom and Casey Bubba, neither of whom ever missed a meal.

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Introduction

Welcome to *7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies*! What you'll find in between the shiny yellow-and-black covers of this book will change your life forever. Instead of standing with the refrigerator or freezer door wide open (didn't your mother ever tell you not to do that? Mine did) and wondering what in the world you're going to serve for dinner in less than an hour, or just giving up and dialing the number of the nearest pizza joint, this book gives you a healthy, budget-friendly menu for every night of the week.

Menu planning is not brain surgery; it's not even rocket science, even though some would have you believe that only a genius can do it successfully. When I show you how simple it is, you'll be amazed. All you need to become a menu planner is a desire to eat healthier, save money, reduce stress, and enjoy delicious meals.

But, I want you to be able to do more than re-create my menus. I want you to be able to follow my guidelines and create your own menus. You'll be the master planner in your house. How's that for something to be proud of? I couldn't agree more. It gives you a lot of power, too, in case you needed more.

I show you step by step how to create your own plans. And while you're at it, I encourage you to teach someone else in the family so that the skill can be passed on to the next generation. Remember, you want to be invited to your daughter's or son's house for dinner sometime in the future.

The whole truth is, we *don't* hate to cook; we just haven't figured out how to plan *what* to cook. That's about to change, starting right now!

About This Book

You've bought this fabulous book (well, I think it's fabulous and so would my mother if she were here on earth), and now you want to know exactly why you're going to love it so much that you'll take it with you to bed for your nighttime reading material. Who cares about steamy novels or scary mysteries when you have the *7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies* to keep you awake with excitement? No falling asleep with the *7-Day Menu Planner* by your side.

One of the biggest advantages of this book is that it provides you with 52 weekly menu plans — that's right, 365 nights of meals. (Yes, I've even included holiday meals. You're welcome.) Some of the meals are straightforward. Other meals might take a little bit of work, and for those I provide "formal" recipes. These recipes don't take a lot of time (who wants to spend all afternoon in the kitchen?), and they taste delicious. Another benefit is that the meals are good for you (there

are a lot of ways to season food that don't involve bacon and butter). Plus, they use common ingredients to save you time and money at the supermarket.

These days, money is a top concern for many families. The amount of money you'll save with your new menu plans will knock your socks off. The faithful readers of my "7-Day Menu Planner" column tell me this all the time. How will you save money? You'll spend wisely and not overbuy. You'll use leftovers in interesting and creative ways instead of wasting food, you won't stop for fast food on the way home, and you'll shop by season, to mention a few ways.

In addition to the menu plans and recipes, I include some information that I hope you'll find helpful. I explain what goes into a healthy meal, how I plan my menus, and how you can plan your own menus. I also offer tricks to minimize your time in the kitchen, tips for saving money at the grocery store, and a list of meals you can count on when you're short on time.

Conventions Used in This Book

By their very nature, cookbooks are about rules. How else would you get your meals to turn out the way I've planned them for you? Here's what you need to know about the recipes:

Milk is fat-free or 1-percent.

Eggs are large.

Butter is salted.

Flour is all-purpose unless otherwise specified.

Sugar is granulated unless otherwise noted.

Brown sugar is packed.

All herbs are fresh unless dried herbs are specified.

All temperatures are Fahrenheit. (If you need to convert temperatures to Celsius, check out the metric conversions in the Appendix.)

All fresh ingredients come directly from the refrigerator unless otherwise noted.

Liquids are measured in glass measuring cups; dry ingredients and semi-solids are measured in metal measuring cups. Spices and herbs are measured in metal measuring spoons.

Chicken should not be "enhanced" with salt, sodium, broth, or brine. (Check the label.)

When you're reading the chapters, know that

All Web addresses appear in monofont.

New terms appear in *italic* and are closely followed by an easy-to-understand definition.

Bold is used to highlight key words in bulleted lists.

“The Virgo” is my husband. I often refer to him that way because he is logical, orderly, and methodical — traits of some of those born under the Virgo sun sign as he was.

What You're Not to Read

It will break my heart if you don't read every word I've written (sniff!), but I'll get over it. You do, however, have my permission to skip the sidebars (the text in the gray boxes). The information in the sidebars isn't essential to menu planning, but it may improve your cooking skills or make meal preparation a little smoother. You can come back to the sidebars when you have the time or the interest.

Foolish Assumptions

In the grand design of the *7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies*, I had to answer some profound questions to create top-notch meals for you. Here are the questions I asked and the answers I came up with — sort of a one-way communication to help you get into my brain:

Who are my readers? You!

Where do they live? All over the United States.

Who is “the family”? I'm not sure, but I'm thinking of Mom, Dad, and a couple of elementary school children. However, the family may be one person or a couple. I hear from all walks of life.

How much money do they have? They're neither rich nor poor.

Do the adults work, or is there a stay-at-home adult in the house? Some work; some stay at home.

Do they like to cook? Sometimes, but not always.

Do they know the value of healthful meals? Do they care? Yes, to both questions.

How much time do they have to prepare and enjoy meals? During the

week, not so much; they have more time for food, family, and fun on the weekends.

Do meals depend on their schedules? Of course.

Does the reader do/cook everything I say? Well, hope springs eternal, but I doubt it.

Is it likely that readers pick and choose which meals to follow? Under duress, I have to admit this is true.

Does this make me throw a tantrum? Occasionally.

How This Book Is Organized

I've divided *7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies* into three parts. Here's what you'll find where.

Part I: The Path to Quick, Healthy, Budget-Friendly Meals

You may be skeptical that planning your menus in advance is worth the time and effort it takes. In this part, I outline the benefits of doing so, show you how I plan menus, and then arm you with what you need to know to plan your own meals. It's not as painful as it sounds — trust me!

Part II: A Year's Worth of Weekly Menu Plans

All the menus, from Week 1 to Week 52, are contained in this one part, and I've organized them by season. (This may not seem important now, but it will when you want to take advantage of seasonal foods for their cost and quality.) Week 1 corresponds with the first week of January; Week 52 is the last week of December. Week 26 marks midyear around the Fourth of July. I encourage you to figure out what week of the calendar you're in, and turn to that week's menu when you're ready to get started. Then follow along from there. When a holiday is on the horizon, know that I've planned a special menu for that night, but you may have to look ahead or back a few days or a few weeks because of the fluid nature of the calendar and the concreteness of this book.

The other thing to know about this part is that each week's menu contains seven themes, marked by a fun little picture in the margin. Here are the themes (flip to Chapter 1 if you want more details about each theme):

 On Family night, you'll prepare a recipe the whole family will enjoy, commonly known as family favorites or sometimes comfort food.

 Kids night does not mean simple food. Although these recipes are lightly seasoned, they do not lack in flavor.

 Express meals take the form of leftovers, a very quick and easy recipe, or a convenience food.

 You'll save some money with the meals I've planned for Budget night. Look for braised or canned meats in stews or salads. Here's where you'd use ground instead of whole meat.

 When you Heat and Eat, you'll often be cooking in the microwave and using leftovers in new ways to get dinner on the table. Sometimes, these meals won't even require heating.

 Meatless nights often feature beans, pasta, or rice.

 A personal favorite is Easy Entertaining night. Invite friends over, splurge a little, and try something new!

Part III: The Part of Tens

In this part of the book, you find chapters on saving time in the kitchen, saving money at the grocery store, my favorite foods to eat for better health, and recipes for meals you can fix in a hurry. I've also included an appendix in this part that can help you convert the measurements in the recipes to metric measurements.

Icons Used in This Book

I want you to pay special attention to some of the main points I make in the chapters in Parts I and III. To call your attention to these must-read ideas, I mark them with icons.



The text next to this icon contains an idea that you simply must know. It may have to do with your health, or it may be something important to remember in the kitchen.



This icon draws your attention to shortcuts, ideas to save you time and money, and other helpful information. You won't want to skip these paragraphs.



You have to be careful when planning meals and cooking. I want you to stay safe in the kitchen and live a long and healthy life, so when I write about something that could cause you harm, I mark it with a Warning icon.

Where to Go from Here

The logical place to go from this point is to Chapter 1! That's where I tell you all the wonderful benefits of menu planning. But if you want to skip the appetizer and head straight for the main course, figure out what week of the calendar it is, and turn to that week in Part II. Then start enjoying the ease of knowing what's for dinner for the next seven nights, seven weeks, or seven months. Expect your plan to go slowly at first, but know that it will grow as a snowball grows into a snowman in no time. The main mandate is that you don't give up too soon. Take the attitude of *I can do it*. Remember: It's never too late to get organized. This book leads you down a path that ends with the family sitting at the table enjoying stress-free, healthful, delicious meals.

Part I

The Path to Quick, Healthy, Budget-Friendly Meals



In this part . . .

Because this isn't your average cookbook, I explain the benefits of mapping out a menu plan in advance, and then I introduce you to the strategies behind planning a week's worth of meals and show you how it's done. I'm so confident that you'll fall in love with the convenience of menu planning that I explain how you can create your own plans. Just follow my lead.