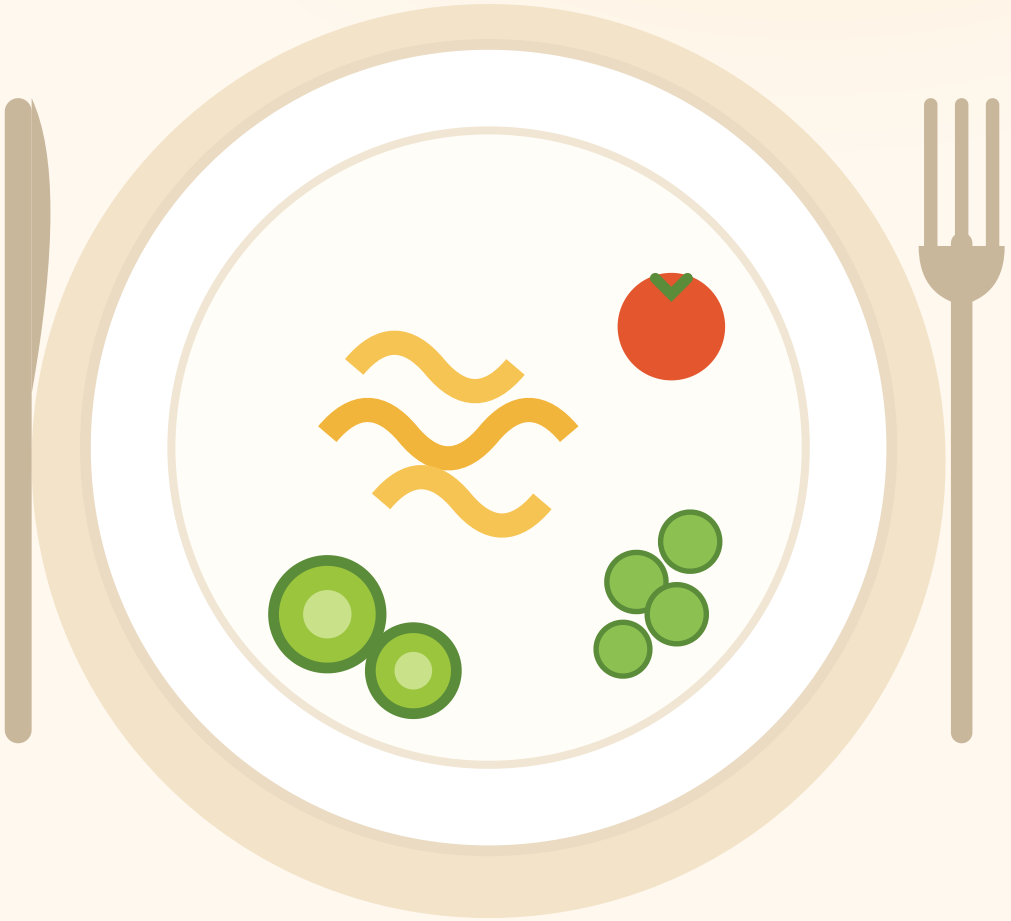
MealAlchemist

FREE GUIDE FROM MEALALCHEMIST · FOR BUSY PARENTS

10 Picky-Kid-Approved Dinners

Real weeknight recipes, all in 30 minutes or less, about $2–3 a serving, with a picky-kid tip for every one.

≤ 30 min each | Budget-friendly | Grocery list by aisle



INCLUDES 1 list FOR ALL 10 DINNERS

From **Daniel**, parent and founder of MealAlchemist · mealalchemist.com

Hi, I'm Daniel.

I'm a parent, and like you, I know the 5:30 pm feeling: everyone's hungry, nobody agrees, and the "what's for dinner?" question lands on you again.

I built **MealAlchemist** to take the mental load out of dinner time. These ten dinners are the kind of food I want on a weeknight: quick, cheap, made from normal supermarket ingredients, and flexible enough that the pickiest person at the table still gets something they'll eat.

Every recipe comes with a **picky kid tip**: a deconstructed version, a plain portion to set aside before the sauce goes in, or a sneaky swap. None of them involve fighting at the table.

Print the grocery list, shop once, and enjoy a week or two where dinner is already decided.

Daniel

Founder, MealAlchemist

How to use this guide

1 · Pick your week

Choose 5 dinners. The grocery list covers all 10, so cross off what you skip.

2 · Shop by aisle

The list is grouped by store section, so you only walk the store once.

3 · Cook in 30

Every dinner takes 30 minutes or less. Use the picky kid tip to keep everyone fed.

Costs are estimates based on typical US supermarket prices (store brands) and will vary by store and region. Check labels for allergens, cook meats to safe temperatures (165°F for poultry, 160°F for ground beef), and cut round foods like cherry tomatoes for little ones.

The dinners

01	Cheesy Black Bean & Corn Quesadillas	20 min · ~$2.10
02	Sticky Honey-Garlic Chicken Bites	30 min · ~$2.60
03	Build-Your-Own Turkey Taco Bowls	25 min · ~$2.60
04	Secret-Veggie Creamy Tomato Pasta	25 min · ~$1.85
05	Microwave Baked Potato Bar	25 min · ~$2.10
06	Speedy Ham & Egg Fried Rice	20 min · ~$1.70
07	Mini Pita Pizzas	20 min · ~$2.40
08	Breakfast-for-Dinner Banana Pancakes	25 min · ~$1.95
09	Mild Chicken Noodle Stir-Fry	25 min · ~$2.40
10	Cheesy Beef & Shells Skillet	25 min · ~$2.90

Picky kid tips, decoded

Deconstructed

Serve the parts separately. Same dinner, nothing touching.

Plain portion set aside

Scoop out a kid portion before the sauce or spice goes in.

Sneaky swap

A small, low-drama change that adds veggies or wins over a skeptic.

MEATLESS

01 Cheesy Black Bean & Corn Quesadillas

20 min	~$2.10	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 8 small (8-inch) flour tortillas
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup frozen corn, thawed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar
- 1 tsp mild taco seasoning
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- Mild salsa and sour cream, to serve

Let's cook

1. In a bowl, mash half the beans with a fork. Stir in the rest of the beans, the corn and the taco seasoning.
2. Spread the filling over 4 tortillas, top with cheese and cover with the remaining tortillas.
3. Cook in a lightly oiled skillet over medium heat for 2–3 minutes per side, until golden and melty.
4. Rest 1 minute, cut into wedges and serve with salsa and sour cream.

PICKY KID TIP · DECONSTRUCTED

Make one plain cheese quesadilla first. Serve the beans and corn in little piles next to it so your kid can dip, pick, or ignore them. No pressure, just exposure.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

CROWD FAVORITE

02 Sticky Honey-Garlic Chicken Bites

30 min	~$2.60	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 1½ lb boneless skinless chicken thighs, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 tbsp cornstarch + a pinch of salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tbsp honey
- 3 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 head broccoli, cut into florets
- 1½ cups white rice (uncooked)

Let's cook

1. Start the rice according to the package.
2. Toss the chicken with cornstarch and salt. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and cook the chicken for 6–8 minutes, until golden and cooked through (165°F).
3. Meanwhile, put the broccoli in a covered microwave-safe bowl with 2 tbsp water and microwave for 3–4 minutes.
4. Turn the heat to low. Add the garlic for 30 seconds, then the honey and soy sauce. Bubble for 1–2 minutes until sticky. Serve over rice with the broccoli.

PICKY KID TIP · PLAIN PORTION SET ASIDE

Scoop out a few chicken bites before the sauce goes in and serve the sauce on the side as a "dip." Kids who dip tend to taste. (Honey isn't for babies under 12 months.)

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

MAKE-YOUR-OWN

03 Build-Your-Own Turkey Taco Bowls

25 min	~$2.60	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 1½ cups white rice (uncooked)
- 1 lb ground turkey
- 1 packet (1 oz) mild taco seasoning + water per packet
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans, drained
- 2 cups shredded lettuce
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- Sour cream, mild salsa and lime wedges, to serve

Let's cook

1. Cook the rice according to the package.
2. Brown the turkey in a skillet over medium-high heat for 6–7 minutes, breaking it up as it cooks.
3. Stir in the taco seasoning and water and simmer for 3–4 minutes until saucy.
4. Warm the beans in the microwave for 1–2 minutes. Set everything out in bowls and let everyone build their own.

PICKY KID TIP · DECONSTRUCTED

The bar is the tip. Every kid starts with a "safe" base (rice + cheese) and chooses their add-ons. Try a "one no-thank-you bite" rule instead of a clean-plate rule.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

HIDDEN VEGGIES

04 Secret-Veggie Creamy Tomato Pasta

25 min	~$1.85	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 1 lb short pasta (rotini or penne)
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 carrots, grated
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 jar (24 oz) marinara sauce
- 2 oz cream cheese
- ¼ cup grated parmesan

Let's cook

1. Cook the pasta in a big pot of salted water. Save ½ cup of the pasta water before draining.
2. Meanwhile, cook the carrots and pepper in the oil over medium heat for 6–8 minutes, until very soft. Add the garlic for 30 seconds.
3. Add the marinara and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the cream cheese and blend until smooth with a stick blender (or a blender, lid vented).
4. Toss with the drained pasta and a splash of pasta water. Top with parmesan.

PICKY KID TIP · SNEAKY SWAP

The blended sauce hides the veggies completely. Just call it "pink pasta," no big reveal needed. For butter-noodle loyalists, set aside a scoop of plain buttered pasta and offer the sauce as a dip.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

05 MAKE-YOUR-OWN Microwave Baked Potato Bar

25 min	~$2.10	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 4 large russet potatoes
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 1 cup diced ham (about 6 oz)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- ½ cup sour cream
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 green onions, sliced (optional)

Let's cook

1. Scrub the potatoes and prick each one 6–8 times with a fork.
2. Microwave on a plate for 10–14 minutes, turning halfway, until a knife slides in easily (microwaves vary). Rest for 3 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, microwave the broccoli, covered, with 2 tbsp water for 3 minutes. Warm the ham in a small skillet for 2–3 minutes.
4. Split the potatoes, fluff with a fork, add butter and set out the toppings.

PICKY KID TIP · DECONSTRUCTED

Scoop the potato into a bowl and mash it with butter and cheese to make "cheesy mash." Serve the toppings in a muffin tin so nothing touches. Skipping the ham? Swap in warmed beans.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

06 BUDGET HERO
Speedy Ham & Egg Fried Rice

20 min	~$1.70	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 4 cups cooked white rice (cold leftover rice works best)
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1½ cups frozen peas & carrots
- 1 cup diced ham (about 6 oz)
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2–3 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 green onions, sliced (optional)
- 1 tsp sesame oil (optional)

Let's cook

1. Heat 1 tbsp oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Scramble the eggs for 1–2 minutes, then set them aside.
2. Add the rest of the oil, then the peas & carrots and the ham. Cook for 3 minutes.
3. Add the rice, press it flat and let it crisp for 2 minutes. Stir and repeat 2–3 times (about 5 minutes).
4. Stir in the soy sauce, sesame oil and eggs. Top with green onions.

PICKY KID TIP · PLAIN PORTION SET ASIDE

Scoop out a kid portion before the soy sauce goes in, and serve the egg, ham and rice in separate sections of the plate. Batch tip: cook extra rice on taco-bowl night.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

KIDS CAN HELP

07 Mini Pita Pizzas

20 min	~$2.40	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 4 pita breads (or naan)
- ¾ cup marinara or pizza sauce
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella
- 3 oz mini pepperoni (optional)
- Any leftover veggies: corn, peppers, broccoli
- 1 cucumber, sliced, to serve

Let's cook

1. Heat the oven to 425°F. Put the pitas on a lined sheet pan and bake for 3 minutes to crisp them.
2. Spread the sauce, sprinkle the cheese and let each person add their own toppings.
3. Bake for 8–10 minutes, until bubbly. Cool for 2 minutes and slice.
4. Serve with cucumber slices on the side.

PICKY KID TIP · SNEAKY SWAP

Kids who build it tend to eat it. Give each child their own pita and a muffin tin of toppings. A "face pizza" with cucumber eyes counts as a vegetable win.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

BUDGET HERO

08 Breakfast-for-Dinner Banana Pancakes

25 min	~$1.95	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp sugar + ½ tsp salt
- 1¼ cups milk (+ a splash for the eggs)
- 1 ripe banana, mashed
- 7 eggs (1 for the batter, 6 for scrambling)
- 2 tbsp butter, melted, plus more for the pan
- Maple syrup and berries, to serve

Let's cook

1. Whisk the flour, baking powder, sugar and salt. In another bowl, whisk the milk, banana, 1 egg and the melted butter.
2. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ones until just combined. Lumps are fine.
3. Cook ¼ cup batter per pancake in a buttered skillet over medium heat. Flip when bubbles form (about 2 minutes), then cook 1–2 minutes more.
4. Meanwhile, scramble 6 eggs with a splash of milk over low heat. Serve with berries and syrup.

PICKY KID TIP · SNEAKY SWAP

The banana is already in the batter. Make mini "silver dollar" pancakes and pour each kid a little cup of syrup to drizzle themselves. If the eggs get refused, a cheese stick or yogurt is fine.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

TAKEOUT SWAP

09 Mild Chicken Noodle Stir-Fry

25 min	~$2.40	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 12 oz spaghetti or lo mein noodles
- 1 lb boneless skinless chicken breast, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp cornstarch
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 8 oz snap peas, sliced
- 1 carrot, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Sauce: 3 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce, 1 tbsp honey, 2 tbsp water, 1 tsp sesame oil (optional)

Let's cook

1. Cook the noodles, drain and toss with a little of the oil.
2. Toss the chicken with cornstarch. Stir-fry in 1 tbsp oil over medium-high heat for 5–6 minutes, until cooked through. Set aside.
3. Add the remaining oil, then the snap peas and carrot. Stir-fry for 3 minutes, then add the garlic for 30 seconds.
4. Return the chicken and noodles, pour in the sauce and toss for 1–2 minutes.

PICKY KID TIP · PLAIN PORTION SET ASIDE

Before the sauce goes in, set aside plain buttered noodles and a few pieces of chicken. Some kids prefer raw snap peas to cooked ones, so try a few raw (sliced) on the side for crunch.

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

10 ONE PAN Cheesy Beef & Shells Skillet

25 min	~$2.90	Serves 4
total time	per serving (estimate)	2 adults + 2 kids

You'll need

- 1 lb ground beef (85–90% lean)
- 1 tsp garlic powder + 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 can (15 oz) tomato sauce
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup milk
- 12 oz small pasta shells
- 1 cup frozen peas & carrots
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar

Let's cook

1. In a large, deep skillet, brown the beef over medium-high heat for 5–6 minutes. Drain the fat and stir in the garlic and onion powder.
2. Add the tomato sauce, broth, milk and shells. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer over medium-low for 10–12 minutes, stirring often, until the pasta is tender. Add a splash of water if it gets dry.
3. Stir in the peas & carrots for the last 3 minutes.
4. Take it off the heat and stir in the cheese until melty.

PICKY KID TIP · DECONSTRUCTED

Like the boxed stuff, minus the box. Peas skeptic at the table? Leave them out of the pot and serve them on the side. Some kids like them straight from the freezer as a crunchy "pea snack."

Family verdict: ☐ Big hit ☐ Maybe again ☐ Never again

Notes:

Grocery list (all 10 dinners)

Grouped by aisle. Check your pantry first, and cross off anything for dinners you're skipping.

Produce

- [ ] Broccoli – 2 heads
- [ ] Carrots – 3 medium
- [ ] Red bell pepper – 1
- [ ] Garlic – 1 bulb
- [ ] Shredded lettuce – 1 bag (8 oz)
- [ ] Cherry tomatoes – 1 pint
- [ ] Russet potatoes – 4 large
- [ ] Bananas – 1–2 ripe
- [ ] Berries – 1 pint (or any fruit)
- [ ] Cucumber – 1
- [ ] Snap peas – 8 oz
- [ ] Green onions – 1 bunch (optional)
- [ ] Lime – 1 (optional)

Meat & Deli

- [ ] Boneless skinless chicken thighs – 1½ lb
- [ ] Boneless skinless chicken breast – 1 lb
- [ ] Ground turkey – 1 lb
- [ ] Ground beef (85–90% lean) – 1 lb
- [ ] Diced ham – 12 oz
- [ ] Mini pepperoni – 3 oz (optional)

Dairy & Eggs

- [ ] Eggs – 1 dozen
- [ ] Milk – ½ gallon
- [ ] Shredded cheddar – 3 bags (8 oz each)
- [ ] Shredded mozzarella – 8 oz
- [ ] Sour cream – 16 oz
- [ ] Cream cheese – 1 small block
- [ ] Butter – 1 stick
- [ ] Grated parmesan – small container

Bread & Bakery

- [ ] Flour tortillas, 8-inch – 1 pack (8+)
- [ ] Pita bread or naan – 4

Grocery list (continued)

Pasta, Rice & Baking

- [ ] White rice – 2 lb bag
- [ ] Short pasta (rotini/penne) – 1 lb
- [ ] Small pasta shells – 12 oz
- [ ] Spaghetti or lo mein noodles – 12 oz
- [ ] All-purpose flour – 1½ cups

Canned & Jarred

- [ ] Black beans – 2 cans (15 oz)
- [ ] Marinara sauce – 2 jars (24 oz)
- [ ] Tomato sauce – 1 can (15 oz)
- [ ] Mild salsa – 1 jar (16 oz)
- [ ] Low-sodium chicken broth – 1 carton (32 oz)

Frozen

- [ ] Corn – 1 bag (12 oz)
- [ ] Peas & carrots – 1 bag (16 oz)

Pantry & Spices (check first)

- [ ] Mild taco seasoning – 2 packets
- [ ] Low-sodium soy sauce
- [ ] Honey
- [ ] Maple syrup
- [ ] Cornstarch
- [ ] Baking powder
- [ ] Sugar
- [ ] Garlic powder
- [ ] Onion powder
- [ ] Vegetable oil
- [ ] Salt & pepper
- [ ] Sesame oil (optional)

Budget notes

- Cook a double batch of rice on taco-bowl night and use the cold leftovers for fried rice.
- The broccoli, ham, cheddar and peas & carrots each show up in more than one dinner, so nothing goes to waste.
- Store brands are fine for every item on this list.
- Rough total for all 10 dinners: **about $85–$110** (estimate), less if you already have the pantry staples.

MealAlchemist

Take the mental load out of dinner time.

Want this every week, made for *your* family?

Dinner sorted in your inbox, made for picky kids and your budget. No app needed. MealAlchemist learns what your family eats (picky eaters, allergies, keto) and gets better every week.

- ✓ **5 dinners a week** by email, planned around your family's tastes, time and budget
- ✓ **One grocery list**, grouped by aisle
- ✓ **One-click swaps** when a dinner doesn't suit
- ✓ **Picky kid tips** built into every recipe

Coming soon

Autopilot and the planner are coming soon. You're on the waitlist, and we'll share prices before you're ever asked to pay.

mealalchemist.com/mealime-alternative

90-day money-back guarantee: paid plans will come with a 90-day money-back guarantee. If MealAlchemist isn't making dinner easier, ask for a refund within 90 days.