

# The Working Mom's Weeknight Dinner Plan

One week of South Asian dinners that fit around a full-time job and a toddler. Shopping list, plan and 8 recipes inside.

Hi, I'm Aanchal. I work full time in home insurance, I'm raising a two-year-old, and I still want us to sit down to a real dinner most nights. This is the plan I actually use: one Sunday cook, quick weeknights, and toddler portions pulled out before the chilli goes in.

# Your week at a glance

| Day | What we eat | Time | Note |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sunday | Sunday rajma chawal | 60 min | Big pot. Freeze half for next week. |
| Monday | Easy chana masala (stovetop or Instant Pot) | 40 min | Make extra for Tuesday's lunchbox. |
| Tuesday | 30-minute moong dal tadka | 30 min | 30 minutes, no soaking. |
| Wednesday | Paneer bhurji lunchbox wraps | 15 min | Dinner tonight, wraps for tomorrow. |
| Thursday | Dry aloo gobi sabzi | 35 min | With dal from Tuesday or roti. |
| Friday | One-pot vegetable khichdi (toddler-approved) | 35 min | One pot, everyone eats the same thing. |
| Saturday | Mini besan chillas (toddler finger food) | 20 min | Breakfast-for-dinner night. |
| Any morning | 10-minute vegetable upma | 17 min | 20-minute warm breakfast. |

## How I make it work

• Sunday: soak the rajma Saturday night, cook it Sunday, and chop onions for the first half of the week.

• Keep canned chickpeas, frozen peas and a block of paneer on hand. They save most weeknights.

• Pull out a toddler bowl before adding chilli. One pot, two spice levels.

• Leftovers are lunch. Every dinner here packs well for work the next day.

# Shopping list

## Lentils, beans & grains

- [ ] Yellow moong dal
- [ ] Basmati rice
- [ ] Dried rajma (kidney beans)
- [ ] Fine semolina (rava)
- [ ] Canned chickpeas (2 cans)
- [ ] Besan (chickpea flour)

## Fresh

- [ ] Onions (6–8)
- [ ] 1 cauliflower
- [ ] Coriander
- [ ] Paneer (200–250 g)
- [ ] Tomatoes (8–10)
- [ ] Ginger and garlic
- [ ] Lemons
- [ ] Rotis or wraps
- [ ] Potatoes (3–4)
- [ ] Green chillies
- [ ] Carrots, peas, beans, zucchini

## Spices

- [ ] Cumin seeds
- [ ] Kashmiri chilli powder
- [ ] Amchur
- [ ] Kasuri methi
- [ ] Mustard seeds
- [ ] Coriander powder
- [ ] Hing
- [ ] Turmeric
- [ ] Garam masala
- [ ] Curry leaves

## Fats

- [ ] Ghee
- [ ] Neutral oil

# Sunday rajma chawal

Sunday | Prep 15 min | Cook 45 min | Serves 5

Slow-simmered kidney beans in an onion-tomato gravy. The weekend comfort meal, with enough left for Monday.

## Ingredients

• 1 cup dried rajma (kidney beans), soaked overnight, or 2 cans, drained

• 2 tbsp oil or ghee

• 1 bay leaf

• 1 tsp cumin seeds

• 2 onions, finely chopped

• 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste

• 3 tomatoes, puréed

• 1 tsp coriander powder

• ½ tsp turmeric

• 1 tsp Kashmiri chilli powder

• 1 tsp garam masala

• 1½ tsp salt

• 3 cups water

• Coriander to serve

• Steamed basmati rice to serve

## Method

1. If using dried rajma, drain the soaked beans and pressure cook with fresh water for 6–7 whistles until completely soft. Kidney beans must be fully cooked.

2. Heat oil, add bay leaf and cumin, then onions. Cook for 10–12 minutes until deep golden.

3. Add ginger-garlic paste for 1 minute, then tomato purée and dry spices except garam masala. Cook until the oil separates.

4. Add the cooked beans with their liquid (or canned beans and 2 cups water) and salt. Simmer for 20 minutes, mashing a few beans to thicken.

5. Stir in garam masala and coriander. Serve over hot rice.

## My tip

Soak the rajma for at least 8 hours. Old or unsoaked beans never get creamy.

# Easy chana masala (stovetop or Instant Pot)

Monday | Prep 10 min | Cook 30 min | Serves 4

A make-ahead favourite that tastes even better the next day. Canned chickpeas make it a true weeknight dinner.

## Ingredients

• 2 cans (540 ml each) chickpeas, drained and rinsed

• 2 tbsp oil

• 1 tsp cumin seeds

• 1 large onion, finely chopped

• 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste

• 2 tomatoes, puréed (or 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes)

• 1 tsp coriander powder

• ½ tsp turmeric

• 1 tsp Kashmiri chilli powder

• 1½ tsp chana masala or garam masala

• 1 tsp salt

• 1 cup water

• 1 tsp amchur (dry mango powder) or lemon juice

• Coriander and sliced onion to serve

## Method

1. Heat oil in a pot (or Instant Pot on Sauté). Add cumin and let it sizzle.

2. Add onion and cook for 8–10 minutes until golden. This is where the flavour comes from, so don't rush it.

3. Add ginger-garlic paste and cook for 1 minute, then the tomato purée and dry spices. Cook until the oil separates, about 5 minutes.

4. Add chickpeas, salt and water. Simmer for 15 minutes, mashing a few chickpeas to thicken the gravy (or pressure cook for 5 minutes).

5. Stir in amchur or lemon. Serve topped with coriander and onion.

## My tip

Brown the onions well. It takes 8–10 minutes, and that's where the deep flavour comes from.

# 30-minute moong dal tadka

Tuesday | Prep 5 min | Cook 25 min | Serves 4

The dal I make when it's 6pm, everyone is hungry and I have nothing planned. Yellow moong cooks fast and needs no soaking.

## Ingredients

• 1 cup yellow moong dal, rinsed well

• 3½ cups water

• ½ tsp turmeric

• 1 tsp salt (adjust)

• 1 tbsp ghee or oil

• 1 tsp cumin seeds

• Pinch of hing (asafoetida)

• 4 garlic cloves, sliced

• 1 small onion, finely chopped

• 1 tomato, chopped

• 1–2 dried red chillies (optional)

• ½ tsp Kashmiri chilli powder

• Handful of chopped coriander

• Squeeze of lemon

## Method

1. Add the rinsed dal, water, turmeric and salt to a pot. Bring to a boil, skim the foam, then simmer partly covered for 20–25 minutes until soft (or pressure cook for 3 whistles).

2. Whisk the cooked dal lightly so it turns creamy. Add a splash of hot water if it's too thick.

3. For the tadka, heat ghee in a small pan. Add cumin and hing, and let the cumin sizzle.

4. Add garlic and fry until just golden, then the onion until soft. Add tomato and cook for 3–4 minutes until it breaks down.

5. Turn off the heat, stir in the red chillies and chilli powder, and pour the tadka over the dal.

6. Finish with coriander and lemon. Serve with rice or roti.

## My tip

Rinse the dal until the water runs mostly clear. It cuts the foam and gives a cleaner taste.

# Paneer bhurji lunchbox wraps

Wednesday | Prep 5 min | Cook 10 min | Serves 3

Scrambled spiced paneer rolled into a roti. Ready in 15 minutes and travels well in a lunchbox.

## Ingredients

• 200 g paneer, crumbled

• 1 tbsp oil or butter

• ½ tsp cumin seeds

• 1 small onion, finely chopped

• 1 small tomato, finely chopped

• ¼ cup finely chopped capsicum (bell pepper)

• ¼ tsp turmeric

• ½ tsp chilli powder

• ½ tsp salt

• ¼ tsp garam masala

• Coriander, chopped

• 3 rotis or tortillas

• Green chutney or ketchup (optional)

## Method

1. Heat oil in a pan. Add cumin, then onion, and cook for 3 minutes.

2. Add tomato and capsicum and cook until soft.

3. Add turmeric, chilli powder and salt, then the crumbled paneer. Stir for 2–3 minutes. Don't overcook or the paneer gets rubbery.

4. Finish with garam masala and coriander.

5. Warm the rotis, spread a little chutney, add the bhurji and roll up tightly. Wrap in foil for the lunchbox.

## My tip

Crumble the paneer by hand, not in a processor, so it keeps some texture.

# Dry aloo gobi sabzi

Thursday | Prep 10 min | Cook 25 min | Serves 4

Potato and cauliflower with simple spices. Goes with roti, dal-rice, or straight into a lunchbox.

## Ingredients

• 1 medium cauliflower, cut into small florets

• 2 medium potatoes, cubed

• 2 tbsp oil

• 1 tsp cumin seeds

• 1 green chilli, slit (optional)

• 1 tsp grated ginger

• ½ tsp turmeric

• 1 tsp coriander powder

• ½ tsp chilli powder

• 1 tsp salt

• ½ tsp garam masala

• Coriander to finish

## Method

1. Heat oil in a wide pan. Add cumin, green chilli and ginger.

2. Add potatoes and cook for 5 minutes, stirring.

3. Add cauliflower, turmeric, coriander powder, chilli powder and salt. Toss well.

4. Cook uncovered on medium-high for 5 minutes for a little colour, then cover and cook on low for 12–15 minutes, stirring once or twice, until tender.

5. Sprinkle garam masala and coriander. Serve hot.

## My tip

Cut the potatoes slightly smaller than the cauliflower so they finish at the same time.

# One-pot vegetable khichdi (toddler-approved)

Friday | Prep 10 min | Cook 25 min | Serves 4

Rice, dal and whatever vegetables are in the fridge, all in one pot. Soft enough for toddlers, cosy enough for the whole family.

## Ingredients

• ½ cup rice (any short or basmati)

• ½ cup yellow moong dal

• 1 tbsp ghee

• 1 tsp cumin seeds

• Pinch of hing

• 1 tsp grated ginger

• 1½ cups chopped vegetables (carrot, peas, beans, pumpkin, spinach)

• ½ tsp turmeric

• 1 tsp salt (less for toddlers)

• 4–5 cups water

## Method

1. Rinse the rice and dal together until the water runs clear. Soak for 10 minutes if you have time.

2. Heat ghee in a pressure cooker or heavy pot. Add cumin, hing and ginger and stir for 30 seconds.

3. Add the vegetables and stir for 2 minutes.

4. Add the drained rice and dal, turmeric, salt and water.

5. Pressure cook for 4 whistles, or simmer covered for 25–30 minutes, stirring now and then, until very soft.

6. Mash lightly with the back of a spoon. Add hot water for a looser texture. Top with a little ghee before serving.

## My tip

Cook it softer than you'd like for yourself. Toddlers prefer it mushy, and you can thicken the adult portion on the stove.

# Mini besan chillas (toddler finger food)

Saturday | Prep 5 min | Cook 15 min | Serves 3

Small savoury chickpea-flour pancakes with grated veg. Soft, easy to hold, and great for little hands.

## Ingredients

• 1 cup besan (chickpea flour)

• ¾ cup water (approx.)

• ¼ cup grated carrot

• ¼ cup finely chopped spinach

• 2 tbsp finely chopped onion (optional)

• ¼ tsp turmeric

• ¼ tsp ajwain (carom seeds)

• Pinch of salt

• Oil or ghee for the pan

## Method

1. Whisk the besan with water to a smooth pouring batter, like pancake batter.

2. Stir in the vegetables, turmeric, ajwain and salt. Rest for 5 minutes.

3. Heat a non-stick pan and brush with a little oil.

4. Pour small spoonfuls of batter (about 3 inches across) and cook for 2 minutes until the edges lift.

5. Flip and cook another 1–2 minutes until golden. Serve warm with yogurt.

## My tip

Rest the batter for 10 minutes. The chillas turn out softer and hold together better.

# 10-minute vegetable upma

Any morning | Prep 5 min | Cook 12 min | Serves 3

A warm, filling South Indian breakfast from semolina and veggies. Faster than toast once you've made it twice.

## Ingredients

• 1 cup fine semolina (sooji / rava)

• 1 tbsp oil or ghee

• ½ tsp mustard seeds

• 1 tsp urad dal (optional)

• 8–10 curry leaves

• 1 small onion, chopped

• 1 tsp grated ginger

• ½ cup mixed vegetables (peas, carrot, beans)

• 2½ cups hot water

• 1 tsp salt

• Lemon and coriander to finish

## Method

1. Dry-roast the semolina in a pan on medium heat for 4–5 minutes until it smells nutty. Set aside.

2. Heat oil, add mustard seeds and let them pop. Add urad dal and curry leaves.

3. Add onion, ginger and vegetables and cook for 3 minutes.

4. Pour in the hot water and salt and bring to a boil.

5. Lower the heat and add the semolina slowly, stirring constantly, so no lumps form.

6. Cover and cook on low for 2 minutes. Fluff up, squeeze in lemon and add coriander.

## My tip

Roast the rava until it smells nutty but stays pale. It stops the upma from going lumpy.

# Made one of these?

Tag @nurturedbyaanchal on Instagram. I'd love to see your table, and I share my favourites.

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