

## 5 Healthy and Easy Meals Made with Chicken

Chicken is a meal-prep staple for a reason. It's easy to prepare in bulk and it's basically a blank slate when it comes to how you want to prepare or season it. You can shift from Taco Tuesday to an Italian-style dish to a curry with the same batch of chicken breasts, so you skip food boredom while making life in the kitchen a lot simpler. And chicken is perfect for young athletes: A serving (3.5 ounces) of chicken provides 19 grams of protein in 165 calories. That means it is one of the easiest ways to ensure that your athlete is getting the protein they need to keep muscles building and recovering even during tough practice and game weeks. For the frazzled parent running between practices and game day, it's a no-brainer.

Here, [TrueSport Expert](#) Kristen Ziesmer, a registered dietitian and board-certified specialist in sports dietetics, shares a few of her favorite ways to stretch a simple chicken meal prep into five fun meals that even picky eaters will love.

### Day 1: Cook a whole chicken in a slow cooker or Instant Pot

Why it's great: "The whole chicken is great because it's iron-rich and protein-balanced, and by adding carbs from potatoes and veggies, this is an easy one-pot meal. Bonus: only one dish to clean!"

How to make it:

- Put whole chicken into slow cooker or Instant Pot with chopped potatoes, broccoli, carrots, and onion, and a small amount of water (about an inch of water around it). Use the 'poultry' setting on an Instant Pot, or set your slow cooker for eight hours on low. Feel free to swap out the vegetables you're using to account for your young athlete's favorites: String beans, sweet potatoes, beets, and cauliflower can all be great options. You can add whatever spices you prefer; poultry seasoning, salt, pepper, and oregano are all easy options to add flavor.
- Serve with your athlete's choice of sauce, like salsa, guacamole, ketchup, honey-mustard, etcetera.
- During cleanup, strip the chicken of extra meat and store in the fridge. Decant the remaining broth at the bottom of the slow cooker into a glass container and store that in the fridge as well—or freeze for later use.

### Day 2: Chicken fajitas

Why it's great: "It's an easy, balanced meal that the whole family can get involved with," Ziesmer says. "The chicken fajitas can also be subbed for chicken tacos and honestly, who doesn't love those?" Have your athletes help with this meal, whether it's by shredding cheese and lettuce, or chopping veggies. Always rushed at mealtime? Buy pre-chopped peppers and onions from the frozen vegetables section at the grocery store, as well as pre-chopped lettuce and pre-shredded cheese.

How to make it:

- Using leftover chicken from the night prior, sauté with pepper and onion strips and fajita seasoning (cumin, chili, salt, and pepper to taste)
- Chop lettuce, shred cheese
- Roughly chop tomatoes, red onions, and cilantro, then toss them together with lime juice and salt to taste for a simple pico de gallo
- Serve as a build-your-own fajita spread with guacamole, lettuce, pico de gallo, salsa, cheese, and corn tortillas. (Pro tip: Warm up corn tortillas for a few seconds in the microwave or in a skillet for more pliability and less breakage.)

### **Day 3: Chicken Soup**

Why it's great: "Chicken soup is great because it's another one pot meal and so easy to clean up!" Ziesmer says. "It's great for cold nights." A soup is the perfect way to use up the rest of your chicken, as well as any random vegetables languishing in the fridge. It's also a simple set-and-forget meal that you can prep in minutes in the morning and have an amazingly easy dinner prep later.

How to make it:

- In the slow cooker or Instant Pot, combine the leftover broth, add canned diced tomatoes, frozen spinach, a vegetable bouillon cube, and a bag of frozen stew vegetables. It's your choice of veggie blend from the dozens of great options out there—pick the one that has the most vegetables that your kids like. This is also a great time to grab any vegetables in the fridge that are going limp.
- You can add chunks of chicken if you have any leftover as well, or even cube some extra firm tofu and add that for bonus protein.
- Feel free to spice things up with additional spices like oregano or chili, or even a squirt of lemon juice.
- Slow cook for 6-8 hours, or use the Stew setting on the Instant Pot.
- Either add rice directly into the pot if everyone wants the same hearty stew or cook rice separately so that everyone can take what they prefer. You could also opt for a fresh loaf of sourdough bread for some tasty dipping!

### **Day 4: Healthy fried chicken**

Why it's great: "Fried chicken is one of those tasty comfort foods that everyone loves," Ziesmer says. "This meal is sure to please even the pickiest eaters. If you want to make it into a dinner meal, pair with a baked potato and steamed green beans, or your athlete's veggie of choice."

How to make it:

- Mix a half-cup of flour and a cup of crushed corn flakes together
- Break an egg into a bowl and lightly scramble with a fork
- Dredge chicken breasts in egg, then coat with the corn flake and flour mixture and place on lightly oiled pan or on parchment paper-lined pan
- Add vegetables to your pan: Chunk up potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, beets, and carrots: Aim for a rainbow of colors surrounding your chicken!
- Bake in the oven at 350 degrees for around 45 minutes, until chicken is cooked through
- Serve with a honey-mustard dipping sauce (you can make this at home mixing a couple teaspoons of honey and a splash of apple cider vinegar into a half-cup of Dijon mustard)

### **Day 5: Fried chicken wraps**

Why it's great: This easy lunch staple is a great way to use leftover fried chicken from the night before to make the perfect lunch to fuel after-school practice. It's also an easy way to clean out the fridge of any extra veggies from the week, since fried chicken will convince even picky eaters to chomp on tomatoes and spinach!

How to make it:

Slice the leftover fried chicken into bite-size chunks

Slice veggies from the fridge, or use leftover fajita toppings (sliced peppers, romaine lettuce, spinach, pickled onions, tomatoes, etc.)

This is a great chance to sneak in some less-loved veggies. Use a cheese grater to shred beets, carrots, or cabbage for some added crunch, or slip in a handful of sprouts or another leafy green that often gets left on your athlete's plate.

In a whole-wheat flour wrap, place the chicken and toppings, and add your child's preferred sauce: guacamole is one great option that adds healthy fat.

### **Takeaway**

Cook smarter not harder using these healthy and easy chicken recipes.



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