



Too busy to cook? You can still enjoy healthy, home-cooked meals every day!

Yvonne McArthur PERSONAL CHEF

6:30 a.m. My cats, Chloe and Pepper, wake me and I pause to remember who I'm cooking for today. Oh, yes, it's one of my regular clients in Oakville, Ont., so I'll be preparing five complete meals, including side dishes, for a family of four; a very busy day!

7:00 A glass of juice in hand, I head to the computer to prepare my client's menu and shopping list. As a member of both the Canadian and United States personal chef associations, I consult with every new client and ask them to fill out a questionnaire, so I can get to know their preferences and learn of any food allergies they may have. I also ask about family pets; if there's a dog or cat in the household, I like to know its likely whereabouts while I'm cooking.

When I first started out as a personal chef several years ago, I had to chase a family dog around the block in an effort to retrieve it after it had slipped out on me. And another time, I had to shoo a sneaky dog out of the kitchen after it had helped itself to a piece of my chicken parmesan—which it still had in its mouth!



Keeping up-to-date client files on my computer helps me avoid nasty surprises like that, and makes my preparations easier.

Usually a regular client will give me their menu selections ahead of time, but sometimes they leave it up to me to decide, so they'll be pleasantly surprised when they get home. Once the selections are made, I print their Menu for Today as well as the necessary container labels and reheating instructions for the meals I'll be preparing. Then I write out my shopping list, and jot down the various pantry items and utensils I'll need to bring with me.

8:30 I load my portable "chef kit" with knives, spices, utensils, oils, broths, dishtowels, pot holders, apron, plastic wrap, dish soap, and everything else I'll need for the day's cooking. I check that I have the client's file and the appropriate recipes with me, as well as their door key or alarm code. I once had a surprise visit from the police while I was cooking because the client had forgotten to turn off their alarm, and I didn't know the code! The cops laughed when I explained my dilemma, but they also thought having a personal chef was a great idea—they even asked me for my business card!

With my shopping list in my pocket and chef's kit packed away, it's off to the grocery store nearest my client's house, where I purchase the required groceries.

10:00 I arrive at the client's home and unload all my gear and their groceries. By this time, I've decided on my order of preparation. Depending on the food selections, I'll preheat the oven, get out the sauté pan and other pots, and begin to sauté their chicken and pork, bake their casseroles or roasts, cook their pasta, grill their meat, and steam the veggies.



While food is cooking, and I have a little time, I'll wash and assemble the salads, make the dressings, and clean up what's been used so far. Being organized is key. One time, I was trying to do too many things at once, and a hot pan set off all three smoke alarms in the house! It took awhile to get them stopped—another lesson learned!

2:30 p.m. Once the cooked meals have cooled down, I place them in containers, portioned as per the family's instructions. Sometimes I use a portable fan to speed up the cooling process. Then, I label and date the containers, and, depending on the family's needs, either refrigerate them or put them in the freezer. Often the family tells me what they plan on eating that evening, so if it's late in the afternoon and the meal is still warm, I'll leave it out for them with a crisp salad, freshly made dressing, and bread.

Then I finish the dishes, scrub down the counters and stovetop, tidy up and sweep the kitchen, seal the garbage, and take the bag with me.

4:00 Home at last! I unload my gear, load the dishwasher, and get a cool drink. Flopping on the couch, I put my feet up. I'm too tired to cook for myself today, so I'll probably order in. Pizza, I think!