Thank you for being willing to set up a meal train, for preparing a meal. Meals are a great way to show community through life’s ups and downs.

Below are some helpful hints when organizing a meal train, or preparing a meal. The main thing to remember is that folks who are on the receiving end of a meal train ministry tend to be going through a lot emotionally. Whether they just brought home a baby, or lost a loved one, or received a diagnosis, it is a lot. The hope of the meal ministry is to make life easier for them, so keep that in mind.

1. **Try not to linger.** Be ready to simply hand off the meal and walk on. Folks may not be in a place where they want to show you their new baby, or talk about their grief. Expect to drop the meal and go.
2. **Bring the meal in a container you don’t need back.** We like being “green” as a community, but asking someone on the receiving end of a meal train to keep track of which Tupperware belongs to whom can be too much. The church has disposable aluminum bakeware that you can pick up during office hours or on Sunday. Just ask Jerome or Cheyanne.
3. **Be very careful to check for food allergies/dietary restrictions**. We have a number of those in our parish, and it can be tricky. Remember that whoever is receiving the meal is the one navigating these restrictions each and every day.
4. **Make something that can be frozen.** Make directions for reheating, and wrap them in the dish. You never know if the food can be eaten right when you deliver. Try and make life easier for the recipient.
5. **Pre-made food is great.** You don’t need to be a great cook to be a great support to someone in a time of need. Sometimes take out is exactly what someone needs, especially if they have dietary restrictions. Pick up a roasted chicken, some deli mac and cheese, and a prepared salad. It’s easy for you and tastes delicious.
6. **Know that you bringing a meal is appreciated more than you can ever imagine.** You might not get a thank you card but know the food you bring is allowing a new mom to spend time with her new baby or giving a grieving spouse time to take a break. The meal you bring could change the whole course of that person's day. So thank you.

**Tips for families with kids:**

1. **Keep it simple.** Little kids have a hard time with complicated dishes and hidden vegetables.
2. **Keep it separate.** If the Mac and cheese touches the chicken, it can cause a breakdown for some kids. The same goes for the vegetables. While adults may love broccoli and beef together, with kids it can be more complicated. A casserole may not be the best choice for a family with little ones.

**Tips for organizers of the meal train**

1. **Coordinate the whole train.** You can use an online tool like [mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com), or our church directory software has a GREAT “Need” tool that works well. When you fill out the form, make sure you talk about where to drop-off and how. Put your contact information in if folks have questions. Spell out food allergies, and anything that should not be brought by. Contact the office if you need tech support. We’re happy to set this part up, if you have the details of where to drop off, when, food restrictions, etc.
2. **Often 2-3 meals a week is better than every day.** Folks with new babies or going through grief often have family and friends also bringing food by. Every day visits can be overwhelming. Consider putting together meal trains for M-W-F, or asking folks to bring a couple of things that can be frozen with them to church on Sunday, making drop-off easy.