

# The Great American Supper Swap

*By Trish Berg; Published in: The Dollar Stretcher online magazine 2007*

The rain pitter-pattered on the roof as I snuggled under our old quilt on the couch with my toddler reading *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* for the fourth time. My stomach began to grumble as I realized that four-thirty had rolled around quicker than I had expected. My older children were diligently working on their homework and my son was playing in the playroom. That four-thirty-and-nothing's-in-the-oven panic hit. Then I remembered that in about a half-hour, a warm, home cooked meal would be delivered to my door for my family to enjoy.

Now, I am not wealthy. I have not hired a caterer. Yet, three days a week, dinner is delivered to my door. Like clockwork, the meals come, and my dinnertime stress is diminished. My kitchen counters stay clean, and my family enjoys wonderful recipes like meatballs and sausage with oriental slaw salad, or poppy seed chicken with broasted potatoes and applesauce. Most of all, I save a ton of money at the grocery store, and actually enjoy shopping again.

It is really simpler than you might expect. I am not a miracle worker, and I am certainly not a chef. I am a mom, who happens to know other moms who live life as hectically as I do. We are girlfriends who were seeking an inexpensive, simple solution to our dinnertime dilemma.

Through supper swapping, we share the cooking responsibility for our families. For about one to two hours of meal preparation, and about thirty minutes of meal delivery time one day a week, I am blessed with four nights of homemade dinners, nourishing my family body and soul!

You don't eat with your girlfriends; you simply share the cooking responsibility for your families. On your cooking day, you simply fix enough food to feed your swapping group, keep one meal for your family, and deliver the other three to your friends.

Monday through Wednesday, supper is delivered to my door, stress free. My cooking day is Thursday. So, Wednesday night, I go to the grocery store while my daughters are at piano lessons. My shopping list is remarkably short, since I only need to buy pantry items for breakfasts and lunches, and the basic necessities our family needs. Then, I purchase one recipe's worth of ingredients, times four.

Once I arrive home, I prepare four identical meals, like baked spaghetti and bread, and put them in our refrigerator. Thursday afternoon, once my son gets on the Kindergarten bus, I load my meals in the car, and deliver them to my swapping girlfriends.

Since I buy in bulk, meals are less expensive, and my grocery bill is reduced. Since we eat out less often, I save money in my budget there. Since I don't buy as many quick fix, frozen dinners, I see even more money savings.

Some swapping groups are neighborhood co-ops. Other families might swap meals with co-workers, church members, civic organizations, or extended family members. Cooking for one another's families is a natural extension of neighborhoods, churches, community service groups and friendships. Any definition of community has the potential to develop a successful supper swapping group.

So on those gray, dreary days when the rain is falling, and you have no idea what to make for supper, when your grocery bill is more than your mortgage payment, rest assured that your girlfriends are there for you with a warm smile, a quiet wink, and a delicious dinner in hand!

Suggestions for starting your own supper swapping group:

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2. Ask a few close friends to try supper swapping with you.
3. Choose families around the same size as yours, with similar tastes and lifestyles, and who live nearby so delivery is not an added burden.
4. Choose recipes to start with that are your family favorites and are kid-friendly.
5. Purchase inexpensive, glass baking dishes with snap on lids and inexpensive semi-disposable containers to share meals; do not expect to get the exact dishes back you sent out.
6. Buy in bulk for your meals, when items are on sale, and try to budget recipes so you don't make two expensive ones in a row. For instance, pot roast is more expensive than pizza burgers.
7. Plan meal calendars two or three months at a time.
8. Write out meal calendars so each member knows what is coming for supper each night, and can add appropriate side dishes.
9. Be flexible with one another when life throws you a curve ball, like a sick child, a broken down car, or unexpected circumstance. Have a meal back up plan for those nights agreed upon at the outset, like switching days or having pizza delivered if you are in a pinch.



10. Relax and enjoy the ride. Don't expect your co-op to last forever, since co-ops do have life cycles. If co-op members leave, try and find new families to fill in the gaps and give it a try. Co-ops with three to five families usually work best.

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For more information on supper swapping, recipes and advice, or other great ideas on simplifying motherhood, visit [trishberg.com](http://trishberg.com). Sign up on her free bulletin board and connect with moms from coast to coast to share your own great ideas. *The Great American Supper Swap - Solving the Busy Woman's Dinnertime Dilemma* (Cook) is scheduled for a 2007 release.

Link: <http://www.stretcher.com/stories/06/06jan23d.cfm>