

Cooking for One or Two?

Linda Bull, Extension Agent, Lewis County

Sally Howard, Extension Agent, Braxton County

In our lifetime, many of us will find ourselves in a situation of cooking for one or two persons. This may be when we leave home to go out on our own, when we get married, when our children leave home, or when we experience the loss of a spouse. A long-term illness can also be a time in which a person might be cooking for just one or two persons.

This is not something that happens just to women; men often find themselves having to cook for one or two persons. This can be a hardship, especially if they are not familiar with meal preparation.

Nutrition still important

Although a person may be preparing foods on a smaller scale, nutrition is still of utmost importance. It is sometimes better to cook a smaller amount of one food than to fix a full recipe of a food and continue reheating it until it is gone. We get tired of that food and do not get a balanced diet of all the foods we need.

The nutrition label on the package of food can be a valuable source of information. The label tells you serving sizes and amounts in the container. The label also gives information about nutrition in the food and the number of calories in each serving. This information will help you stay within the range of calories you are to consume each day.

Changes as we age

As we age, we find that foods don't taste as good as they once did, our eyesight isn't as good, and food preparation is more difficult. Foods don't smell as savory as they should, so we are tempted not to eat as well as we once did. Medications may affect the tastebuds so that foods don't seem as tasty as they once were.

Changes in our bodies, such as loss of teeth or changes in the digestive system, may mean we don't eat the foods we once did.

Turning to a multivitamin is not the answer, although multivitamins can be helpful. Many nutrients are easy to obtain with delicious foods. A quickly swallowed multivitamin still leaves us with the need to "eat with our eyes," to smell the flavorful aromas of foods, and to enjoy the stimulation of actually eating.

Plan ahead

Cooking for one or two can be a challenge, but it can also be fun! This might be the time you could try foods you have not eaten before, buy foods that might not have been in your budget, or entertain and have a variety of foods you may not have served at another time.

Planning meals will help when you shop. You will know that you need to buy a whole bag of apples, but only a couple of potatoes, for instance. One great advantage is buying frozen foods in large, recloseable packages. You can take out what you need and reseal the package and use the rest another day.

Shopping with family or friends will allow you to purchase things together, share the cost, and not be as concerned about spoilage. Purchase herbs and spices with someone and share them so they can be used while fresh. Be sure to put a date on them so you know when you bought them. This will also help you know how often you use a particular item.

Occasionally, you may want to plan a meal of just leftovers. This gives you a chance to use those foods before they are spoiled and not waste money.

Food preparation can be expensive. There is a greater potential for waste when you cook smaller amounts. Planning ahead can help you save money. Looking at the food ads in newspapers and store flyers will let you see what foods are going to be on sale at special prices for the next week. This is a good time to sit down and put meals together on paper so that you have an idea of what you need to buy and where you can get the best prices for the foods you need. It is also a good time to check on the foods you have on hand so you can use them while they are still fresh.

Preparation ideas—even for one or two

Sharing meals with persons in the same situation is a way of breaking the monotony of eating the same foods and eating alone. Putting meals together with friends and neighbors is an economical, interesting, and practical means of getting more well-balanced meals.

If you have a pretty plate, you may want to use that to make mealtime more inviting. Eating at the dining room table, rather than in front of the television can make mealtime special. Adding a special bouquet of flowers, a pretty decoration, or holiday arrangements can also make the surroundings more appealing. Soft music can help mealtime become a special time. These “gimmicks” will help you find mealtime more pleasant. Eating right does not mean eating more, but rather eating the foods you need to obtain the greatest health benefit.

Because you are cooking small amounts of food, you may be able to buy foods you can't afford in larger quantities. Saving money on some meals will allow you the opportunity to buy foods you might not have otherwise considered. It may allow you to purchase foods out of season when they are a bit more expensive.

Don't forget safety

Keeping you and your foods safe is also of utmost importance. Even small quantities of improperly handled food can cause foodborne illness. Follow all the basic food safety procedures to keep the food you prepare safe and to keep you healthy.

Sharing—even if you cook for more than two

Even people who prepare larger amounts of food can share with those who cook for just one or two. Such persons often delight in getting to join a family setting. They remember what fun families can be and how tasty foods can be when shared with other people.

Challenge: Identify a person who is cooking for one or two persons and invite him or her to join you for a meal. If this is not possible, prepare something you can share with the person that would be just the right amount of food.

Sources:

“Cooking for Two,”

USDA Program Aid No.1043, 1973.

“Food Facts For Older Adults,”

USDA Home and Garden Bulletin 251, 1993.

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