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# Healthy Cooking for One or Two

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Family and Consumer Sciences

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One does not have to be a lonely number! Whether you are a senior citizen, college student, bachelor, or bachelorette, cooking for one or two can be easy and fun. Although finding the motivation to cook for yourself can sometimes be difficult, it is well worth it. According to *Public Health Nutrition Journal*, researchers found that frequent cooking at home leads to consuming fewer calories both at home and when eating out when compared to those who seldom cooked (Wolfson and Bleich 2015).

While throwing a TV dinner in the microwave can seem like a simple answer, eating boxed convenience foods can take a toll on physical and mental health, as well as a waistline. Fast food as well as processed food (food from a box or container) tend to be low in nutrition and high in fat, sugar, sodium, and calories, and therefore are not as good for the body.

Preparing food at home can be quick and easy. Finding meal ideas and recipes for one or two people is easy with the internet and virtual cooking classes. Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

## Be Mindful and Plan

When planning what to prepare, it helps to keep a few things in mind:

- What foods do you like?
- What foods need to be

used up in your refrigerator?

- What is your schedule like?
- Do you have more time on the weekends to prepare?

Being mindful of these things can make it easier when planning and preparing healthy meals at home. Also remember, try to purchase fresh food when possible. Selecting canned food without extra salt, sugar, or additives can also be a good choice when fresh food is not available.



*Figure 1. Preparing and cooking food at home usually results in consuming less calories when compared to restaurant meals. Photo by Adobe Stock.*

Cooking at home for one or two can be quick and easy for every meal of the day:

- **Breakfast** - High-fiber cereal, yogurt, or a fruit or protein shake with fruit and vegetables.
- **Lunch** - Leftovers from previous night's dinner, a homemade sandwich, or a simple salad.
- **Dinner** - Crockpot meals, chicken with vegetables, breakfast omelet, or a microwaved baked potato filled with canned tuna and served with steamed vegetables.

## Cook Once, Eat Twice

No time to cook you say? Then, cook once, and eat twice! By cooking a larger meal, you can then re-use or freeze leftovers for the next week. For example, if you cook chicken, vegetables, and rice one evening for dinner, just cook twice the amount of chicken and use it the next day in a wrap for lunch, on a salad, or in a sandwich! Cook once, eat twice! This cuts down on the number of times you need to cook new meals from scratch and helps you stay on track with healthy eating by staying away from processed foods.

## Inspirations on Planning Healthy Meals

Inspirations for cooking come from many places—friends, magazines, and the internet—but the best inspirations come from tasting good food. Think of what kind of ingredients

you like to eat and use those ingredients to inspire your favorite recipes.

You may also want to use online resources for ideas on planning healthy meals. One great resource is the USDA's [ChooseMyPlate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov). This site

emphasizes fruit, vegetable, grains, protein, and dairy groups and gives specific examples for

planning and preparing healthy

meals, including recipes, healthy eating tips, trackers for physical activity, and much more (USDA 2020; USDA 2021). When you visit [ChooseMyPlate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov), click on the "MyPlate Kitchen" tab for great recipes in full color. For meal-specific recipes, type "breakfast" or "dinner" in the search box.



*Figure 2. Cook large meals, and then freeze or re-use leftovers for a second meal to cut down on cooking time. Photo by Adobe Stock.*

Here are a few online resources to get you started:

- [choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov)
- [snaped.fns.usda.gov/nutrition-education/recipes](https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/nutrition-education/recipes)

Keep in mind, food does not last forever. Be sure to label and store food in air-tight containers and refrigerate it within two hours. On average, plan on using up food within three to four days (USDA 2020).

## Take Time to Enjoy

Planning and preparing healthy meals can bring a sense of accomplishment.

Additionally, taking the time to eat well can bring much enjoyment— a fit body, good health, and a reduced risk of many diseases. Make eating an exciting part of your day.

Consider using some of the ideas outlined in this fact sheet, or from the websites below, to prepare quick, easy, healthy meals that taste great:

- [choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov)
- [ohioline.osu.edu/ss-fact/pdf/0161.pdf](https://ohioline.osu.edu/ss-fact/pdf/0161.pdf)
- [snaped.fns.usda.gov/resources/nutrition-education-materials/recipes-and-menus](https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/resources/nutrition-education-materials/recipes-and-menus)

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