

# Single Meals Made Simple

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Follow these tips to help you overcome the challenge of cooking good meals for yourself.

Cooking for one doesn't have to be a chore you avoid. If you are skipping meals or eating out every night rather than cooking for yourself, your health can suffer in the long-term. With a little planning and creativity, you can eat healthy, nutritious meals that are quick and satisfying. Here are some ways to cook for yourself and enjoy doing it.

## Plan ahead

- Check your calendar for the coming week. Take into account any meals you'll eat away from home. Then jot down ideas for breakfast, lunch and dinner for the week.
- Check your pantry, cupboards and freezer. Then buy only those things you don't have for the next week.

## Buy fresh more often, in smaller amounts

- Buy smaller packages if it means you'll eat it before it goes bad. Greens tend to spoil quickly. You may lean toward the larger size salad mix, but if you only plan on using it twice during the week it may not be your best value.
- Buy only the amount of dairy products you'll use before they spoil. This might mean buying a quart of milk instead of a gallon. Or a four pack of yogurt instead of a two larger containers.
- If you'll really bake banana bread with those overripe ones, then go ahead and buy a bunch. If you regularly toss out two or three, buy only what you know you'll eat.

## Cook big and freeze small

- Once or twice a week, cook larger meals and freeze individual portions for later. Soups, stews, chili, casseroles, meatloaf, spaghetti sauce or burger patties all make for good frozen meals.
- Mark the packages with the date and item. As you add new foods to your freezer, pull earlier foods to the front.
- Buy meat, poultry and fish on sale and repackage it into smaller, meal-size portions.

## Repurpose leftovers

- If you make rice or grains for dinner, make enough for another meal. Use the leftover in a stir-fry, casserole or soup.
- Some grains and pastas like quinoa, barley or couscous can be warmed with fruit, nuts or spices as a morning substitution for oatmeal.
- Instead of cooking just one chicken breast, make several and use the extras in salads, sandwiches or freeze for later use.

### **Keep convenience foods on hand**

- Keep a supply of your favorite low-fat, low-sodium soups on hand and buy a variety of canned low-sodium fruit and vegetables.
- Canned tuna and salmon are great quick additions to a sandwich, wrap or salad.
- Canned beans of all kinds can be added to salads, wraps or to canned low-sodium broth with a little fresh spinach or kale for a quick healthy soup.
- Yogurt, cereal, nuts, seeds and fresh fruit are a healthier alternative than a pint of ice cream.

### **Keep safety in mind**

- When preparing food for more than one meal, it's important to refrigerate or freeze foods within two hours of preparation.
- Cover foods to be refrigerated in containers with airtight lids. Freeze items in proper freezer containers or packaging.
- Reheat thoroughly. Add water if necessary to reduce dryness in frozen foods.

### **Be creative in preparation and dining**

- Try a new herb, spice, ingredient or ethnic flavor.
- If eating by yourself doesn't appeal to you, how about packing a picnic and eating it at a nearby park.
- Make enough for two and invite a friend or neighbor over.
- Go ahead: use your good china, light a candle and put on your favorite music.
- Realize that you control the menu and don't have to work around other people's taste buds. Cooking and eating for one means you can decide when, where and what you'll eat.

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Sources:

- [Helpguide.org](http://Helpguide.org). Cooking for one.
- The Mayo Clinic. Healthy cooking for 1 or 2.

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