



K-State Extension Connection

Easy Meals for Two or Just For You

Barbara L. Ames

Wildcat District Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

Do you feel like it just isn't worth the time it takes to prepare a meal for only one or two people? Do you find yourself settling for less healthy frozen dinners or take-out food more often than you would like? If you are answering yes to these questions, you may be selling yourself short. Try experimenting with the following tips designed to help you find the inspiration to prepare and enjoy healthy meals...even when cooking for one or two. Remember, your health is important and **you** are worth the effort!



Healthy Cooking: How to get started-

- **Make a plan.** Take time to jot down the week's menu and a shopping list. You'll find it makes your grocery shopping easier and ensures that you have everything you need when you're ready to cook.
- **Stock your pantry.** Keep canned vegetables, beans and fruits on hand for quick and healthy additions to meals. Consider whole grains, such as brown or wild rice, quinoa, barley, and pasta. Dried foods are easily portioned for one. More suggestions for pantry staples can be found at: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3516.pdf>.
- **Take advantage of your freezer.** Buy in bulk and freeze into smaller quantities that you can thaw and cook for one or two meals. You may be surprised to learn that you can freeze foods, including breads, meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts and seeds. Freezing keeps food fresh longer and helps prevent waste. For the best quality, freeze food while it's fresh. Many items are sold in convenient re-sealable packages so you can use just what you need. More tips for staple items to keep in your freezer can be found at: <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3517.pdf>.
- **Prepare one-dish meals.** For quick and simple cooking, choose a dish that serves as the whole meal. Look for dishes that include items from several food groups, such as meats, whole grains, legumes and vegetables. Healthy examples include beef, barley and vegetable stew; chicken, vegetable and rice casserole; turkey and bean casserole; and vegetarian chili.
- **Cook a batch and freeze into single portions.** For example, make a casserole or stew and freeze the extra into individual-size servings. Then take out only the amount of food you need. You will need to experiment so that you don't have more leftovers than you can use. Be sure to write the date and contents on packages and move older packages forward as you add food to your freezer.

- **Cook once, use twice.** Plan meals so that you can use the extra food in new dishes. For example, cook rice as a side dish for one meal, then use the remainder in a casserole. Bake chicken for a meal and use the leftovers in sandwiches or soup, or toss with greens, dried fruit and nuts for a tasty salad. Or make a meatloaf mixture and bake some as a meatloaf and use the rest for meatballs that can be frozen and eaten later.
- **Shop with convenience in mind.** There will be days when you don't have the time or don't want to cook. So, plan ahead and keep on hand ready-to-eat, low-fat, reduced-sodium canned soups and healthy frozen meals or prepackaged single-serving foods. The latter can be pricey, so stock up when you find a sale.

Healthy cooking: Making it fun-

Finding inspiration may be one of the biggest challenges when it comes to cooking for one. Fortunately, you can find a multitude of cookbooks about cooking for one or two people. Some even provide practical advice on such things as selecting healthy foods, planning menus, shopping and reading food labels.

Don't be afraid to mix things up and try a nutritious snack instead of a traditional meal when you're short on time or energy. For example, make a smoothie by blending fresh, frozen or canned fruit with low-fat yogurt or milk with ice. It's a great way to use up overripe fruit. Other snack-turned-meal ideas are corn muffins served with apple and cheese slices, or fat-free refried beans mixed with salsa, a small amount of low-fat sour cream and baked tortilla chips.

Finally, why not treat yourself to company from time to time? Invite friends or relatives over to sample some of your home cooking. Or start a cooking club — it's a great opportunity to try new recipes and have fun in the kitchen.

Find more information about these topics and others, by contacting the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district.

For more information, please contact Barbara Ames, Family and Consumers Sciences Agent, bames@ksu.edu, (620)331-2690.

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