

Family & Consumer
SCIENCES

Knowledge
for Life

Cooking for ONE OR TWO

Prepared by Connie Bretz
Family and Consumer Science Agent
Walnut Creek Extension District



Cooking for One or Two

If you are eating by yourself tonight, you're not alone. You're part of a growing trend. The U.S has more than 61 million one-and-two person households.

For many, cooking for one or two seems like too much work. Often recipes serve at least four. Bulk foods may be economical but not necessarily interesting over time. Perishable foods may be difficult to keep on hand without wasting them. Mealtime can be lonely. Plus, cooking inherently means doing dishes.

The good news is that preparing meals for one or two can be easy—and enjoyable—by planning ahead and making meals simple. Plus, many manufacturers now cater to the single diner with pre-packaged individual serving foods to help you create well-balanced meals.

Sometimes, cooking for one or two may seem like it's not worth the trouble; however, everyone needs a variety of foods to stay healthy. Homemade meals usually are more nutritious, better tasting and more economical, compared with restaurant meals.

Nutrition is Still Important

Eating well and being physically active play a major role in your overall health status. The latest U.S. Department of Agriculture food icon, MyPlate, provides individualized plans to help guide your food choices. The web site at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov offers information to keep you on track with your nutritional needs.

Remember these key messages:

- Make at least half of your grains whole
- Vary your veggies
- Focus on fruit
- Get your calcium-rich foods
- Go lean with protein
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables
- Switch to fat-free or low fat (1%) milk and other low fat dairy products



Ten Tips for a Healthful Diet

1. Eat a variety of food

- Eating a variety of foods help ensure that you get all of the disease-fighting potential you can from your diet.
- Eating a variety of foods also helps limit your exposure to any pesticides or toxic substances that may be present in a particular food.

2. Eat a rainbow of colors from fruits and vegetables.

- Aim for 2 ½ cup of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit a day, based on a 2,000 calorie diet. If you consume fewer calories then consume fewer servings.

- The more colorful the produce the better as this indicates higher levels of phytochemicals, which may help protect against certain diseases.
- Choose whole fruits and vegetables over juices for more fiber.

3. Eat more “whole grains”

- Whole grains include whole-grain bread, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice and oatmeal. These are rich in fiber .
- Look for foods that have all the grains listed as whole grains.
- At least half of your grains should be whole grains.

4. Focus on fiber

- Eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains along with legumes, beans, nuts and seeds provides the fiber you need to help keep you regular and your blood levels steady.
- Aim for 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories you eat.
- Eat a variety of high fiber foods to get a mix of both soluble (the kind that helps lower cholesterol) and in-soluble fiber (the kind that keeps you regular).

5. Get “good” (unsaturated fats)

- These are found in vegetable oils (such as olive, canola, peanut, sesame, corn, soy, and safflower), nuts and seeds, avocados, and fatty fish (such as salmon and sardines)
- Cut back on saturated fats (found primarily in animal products) by choosing lean meats, skinless poultry, and nonfat or low-fat dairy foods.
- Avoid trans fats (supplied by partially hydrogenated oils in many processed foods), as these fats boost LDL (bad) cholesterol and have other adverse effects.

6. Cut down on sodium and eat more potassium-rich foods.

- Sodium raises blood pressure in many people and has other adverse health effects.
- Limit sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (less than 1 teaspoon of salt) per day.
- Those over age 50, all blacks, and those with hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should limit daily intake to less than 1500 mg. (less than two-thirds of a teaspoon).
- Much of the sodium we eat comes from packaged foods so read labels before purchasing.
- As you cut back on sodium, you should also consume more potassium, as found in produce and dairy foods. Potassium-rich foods include citrus fruits, bananas, potatoes, beans, and yogurt.

7. Consume enough calcium and vitamin D.

- Calcium is important for bone health as well as other potential benefits.
- Get your calcium from low-fat or non-fat dairy foods.
- If you don't eat dairy, get calcium from plant sources such as dark leafy greens, beans, and almonds.
- Many foods are now fortified with calcium, including some orange juices and soy beverages.
- If you can't get the optimal amount from foods, take a calcium supplement. (1,000 mg to 1,200 mg depending on your age and sex)
- It's hard to consume enough vitamin D from food, and getting it from sun exposure is risky and unreliable.
- Many people, especially those over age 60, or have darker skin, need to take a Vitamin D supplement (800 to 1,000 IU a day) to meet their daily needs.

8. Watch out for liquid calories

- Beverages now supply more than 20 percent of calories in the average American's diet.
- Some are healthful, such as milk and 100% fruit juices, but most come from soda and other sweetened beverages and alcoholic drinks, which add many calories but few or no nutrients.

9. Keep portions moderate

- Avoid super-sized servings of food and beverages, especially of high-calorie foods.

10. Plate it Right

- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.
- Fill one fourth your plate with grains (such as brown rice)
- Fill one fourth your plate with protein foods (fish, poultry, meat, eggs).

Enjoy Your Meals

- Enjoy your meals with a friend. Eating is a social activity; and if you now find yourself eating alone and that it is affecting your appetite, find a friend who is in the same situation as you. Make plans to eat together as often as you both can.
- Create a pleasant place to eat. Set and eat at a table. Use your fancy dishes and glasses. Add a centerpiece, light some candles and play some music. Try a new recipe. Invite a friend over to a two-person potluck.
- Pamper yourself with an occasional extravagance. Prepare a more expensive cut of meat or a favorite out-of-season fruit. Think of ways to keep mealtimes fun and enjoyable. The benefits are worth the effort.

Plan Ahead

It does take a little extra planning to prepare meals for only one or two people, but planning ahead can save you not only time but money as well.

Take time to jot down a 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 prepare a meal.

Set a goal to plan menus for a week at a time, and incorporate your "planned-overs".

Examples:

- Cook a large quantity of chicken breasts at the beginning of the week and use them in several recipes for the remainder of the week. For example, chicken salad, chicken casserole, chicken soup, etc.
- Make a small roast on Sunday and then use the leftover meat for a sandwich one day and a beef-vegetable stir fry another day.
- Cook rice as a side dish for one meal, then use the remainder in a casserole or rice pudding.
- Make a meatloaf mixture and bake some as a meatloaf and freeze the uncooked portion to use later in stuffed peppers.

- Add leftover fruit to muffins, quick bread or pancake batter.
- Freeze planned-over vegetables and use in stews, soups and other dishes.
- Use extra bread to make French Toast, bread pudding or stuffing.
- Use planned-over meat in tacos, soup or stir-fry, or on salads.

Shopping Tips

Most grocery stores carry thousands of items. While at the grocery store, try these tips to reduce time and choose nutritious items.

Shop during off-hours. Try not to shop while you're hungry because you might be encouraged to add extra items to your cart.

Consider buying items in bulk if you can repackage and store items. Items such as fruit may spoil before you can eat it all.

Repackage meat in freezer bags for smaller servings and freeze.

Compare Nutrition Fact labels to get the most nutrition for your money.

Compare "Unit Prices" on foods. Sometimes the item that has the lower unit price isn't the "best deal" if you tire of the food before you use it all. You may also want to bring a calculator to help compare prices.

Consider individually packaged servings of items if you frequently have leftovers.

- String cheese, wrapped cheese slices
- Single containers of tuna, soup, or fruit.
- Individual cartons of yogurt



Buy a smaller number of servings from the meat counter.

- Enjoy one pork chop
- Purchase a single salmon filet.
- Try a small, different cut of meat

Buy fruit at varying stages of ripeness.

- Buy some fruit to eat immediately and some to ripen for later.
- Apricots, bananas, cantaloupe, kiwi, nectarines, peaches, pears, and plums continue to ripen after purchase.
- Refrigerate fruit after it has ripened for longer storage.

Buy frozen vegetables in bags.

- Pour what you need. Use within 8 months or per package guidelines.
- Toss into soups, casseroles, salads.
- Thaw corn or peas in a strainer under cool running water for salads.
- Frozen veggies are often lower in sodium than canned veggies.
- The taste of frozen fruits and vegetables is often comparable to fresh

Keep canned foods on hand

- Nutrition is comparable to fresh/frozen.
- No refrigeration space needed.
- Great for emergencies as they only need a manual can opener
- Check the “use by date” on cans for best quality/safety.
- Rotate canned foods so that you use the oldest cans first. Put new purchases to the back of the shelf and pull older cans to the front.
- Once opened use within 3-4 days. Always remove the food from the can and store leftovers in a separate container in the refrigerator.
- Look for low sodium canned foods.

- Rinse canned vegetables and beans under cold running water to lower their salt content.

Shop at supermarket salad bars

- Purchase small amounts of fruits/vegetables.
- Buy individual salads
- Use foods within 1-2 days of purchase for best quality.

Take advantage of the many convenience foods in the supermarket. Watch for sales and stock up.

- Look for low-fat frozen entrees or dinners
- Low-fat frozen pancakes and waffles
- Egg substitutes
- Soy burgers
- Low-fat yogurt and cheeses
- Bagged salads

Many frozen foods can now be purchased in larger packages that are designed for you to only take out what you need. That way food is on hand for variety, so you don't have to eat the same food for 3 days in a row.

Examples:

- Vegetables, fruits
- Frozen chicken breasts
- Pre-made fish or chicken

Keep some fortified cereal on hand for a quick meal.

- Buy hot cereals made with whole grains like whole-wheat farina or oatmeal.
- A top choice is a cereal labeled 100% whole grain. Look for a cereal with a whole grain at the top of the ingredient list.
- Look for cereal that provides at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.
- Be wary of cereals with added dried fruit, as the fruit is often sugar-coated. A better alternative is to

buy a plain cereal and add your own raisins or fresh fruit at home.

- Limit sugar to 8 grams per serving; 4-5 grams is better.
- Look for cereal with less than 180 mg per serving of sodium.
- Look for store brands or cereals that are packaged in a bag instead of a box. Read nutrition labels—but most offer the same product as the brand name cereal for a fraction of the price.

Stock your Pantry, Refrigerator and Freezer

Avoid the “there’s nothing to eat” dilemma by having some items on hand in your pantry.

- Flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder
- Condiments, herbs and spices
- Rice and pasta
- Dried beans and lentils
- Canned tomatoes and sauce

Keep some time-saving ingredients available, such as pasta sauces, boneless chicken breasts and frozen bread dough. These are “speed scratch” ingredients that can make “homemade” meals fast to prepare.

Dried foods are easily portioned for one and will store easily.



Cook a Batch and Freeze Single Portions

For example, make a casserole or stew and freeze individual-size servings.

Be sure to write the date and contents on packages and move older packages forward as you add food to your freezer.

Prepare One-Dish Meals

For quick and simple cooking, choose a dish that serves as a whole meal. Look for dishes that include items from several food groups, such as meats, whole grains, legumes and vegetables. Example: chicken, vegetable and rice casserole.

Choose Healthy Cooking Methods

Baking, broiling, steaming and stir-frying are examples of heart-healthy cooking.

Try using cooking spray instead of shortening to grease pans. Make a one-pot meal by adding vegetables to cooking meat and pasta. Save time by cooking items in a microwave or steaming.

Food Safety

Make sure to handle foods properly to keep it safe. Even small amounts of unsafe foods can cause foodborne illness.

Follow the basic food safety procedures of

1. Clean, 2. Separate, 3. Cook, 4. Chill

1. Clean

Wash hands and surfaces often

Wash surfaces and utensils after each use.

- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next item.
- As an extra precaution, you can use a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water to sanitize washed surfaces and utensils.

Wash fruits and veggies

- Rinse under running water, do not use soap, detergent, bleach or commercial produce washes.
- Scrub firm produce—like melons, cucumbers with a clean produce brush.
- Pre-washed bagged produce is safe to use without further washing.

Do not wash meat, poultry or eggs

- Washing raw meat and poultry can actually help bacteria spread, because their juices may splash onto and contaminate your sink and countertops.
- All commercial eggs are washed before sale. Any extra washing may actually increase cross-contamination, especially if the shell becomes cracked.

2. Separate

Even after you've cleaned your hands and surfaces thoroughly, raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs can still spread illness-causing bacteria to ready-to-eat foods—unless you keep them separate.

- Use separate cutting boards and plates for produce and for meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs.
- Use separate plates and utensils for cooked and raw foods.
- Once a cutting board gets excessively worn or develops hard-to clean grooves—replace it. Make sure you aren't contaminating foods in your grocery bag by keeping raw meats and poultry in plastic bags and keeping away from the other foods.
- Place raw meat, poultry and seafood in containers or sealed plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping or leaking onto other foods.
- Keep eggs in their original carton and store in main compartment of refrigerator and not in the door.

3. Cook

Bacteria that cause food poisoning multiply quickest in the danger zone between 40 degrees and 140 degrees F.

- Always cook food to the proper temperature as determined with a food thermometer.
- Keep food hot after cooking (at 140 degrees or above) by using a heat source such as a chafing dish, warming tray, or slow cooker.
- Microwave foods thoroughly to 165 degrees F.
- Stir food in the middle of heating
- Let microwaved food sit for a few minutes to allow the colder areas of the food time to absorb heat from hotter areas of food. Then check with food thermometer to make sure it is 165 degrees or above.

4. Chill

Illness-causing bacteria can grow in perishable foods within two hours unless you refrigerate them. If the temperature is 90 degrees F. or above it will only take 1 hour.

- Refrigerate perishable foods within 2 hours
- Never thaw or marinate foods on the counter
- Thaw in the refrigerator
- Thaw in cold water
- Thaw in microwave
- Cook without thawing
- Know when to throw food out – follow safe storage times

Reduce Your Favorite Recipes

Choose recipes that fit your tastes and time requirements. You can adapt many of your favorite family recipes to fit your current household size.

Try these tips to help reduce your recipes:

- Choose recipes that are easy to divide mathematically. In recipes calling for three eggs, use two eggs and remove 2-4 tablespoons of liquid (if present) from the recipe.
- If a recipe calls for a can of beans or soup and you would like to divide the recipe in half, use what you need and either refrigerate or freeze the remaining food. Label the container with the contents and date.



- Add seasonings gradually. Sometimes you may need to add more (or less) of the spice to reach the desired flavor.
- Check for doneness of halved recipes five to 10 minutes sooner than the original recipe.
- Keep notes about what works—and what doesn't.

Helpful Equivalents

1 cup = 16 tablespoons
 1 tablespoon = 3 teaspoons
 1 cup = 8 fluid ounces
 1 fluid ounce = 2 tablespoons
 1 pound = 16 ounces (weight)
 1 pint = 2 cups
 1 quart = 2 pints

Changing Pan Sizes

9 x 2 x 13 inch pan holds 14 to 15 cups

For half, use

–Square 8 x 2 inch

–Round 9 x 2 inch

Reduce oven temperature by 25 degrees F if substituting glass for metal pan.

Making Half a Recipe

When the Recipe calls for :	Use:
1/4 cup	2 tablespoons
1/3 cup	2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons
1/2 cup	1/4 cup
2/3 cup	1/3 cup
3/4 cup	6 tablespoons
1 tablespoon	1 1/2 teaspoons
1 teaspoon	1/2 teaspoon
1/2 teaspoon	1/4 teaspoon

Making One-Third of a Recipe

1/4 cup	1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon
1/3 cup	1 tablespoon + 2 1/3 teaspoons
1/2 cup	2 tablespoon + 2 teaspoons

These web sites let you adjust their recipes to smaller yields:

www.mealsforyou.com (click on recipes)

www.allrecipes.com (click on “all recipes recipe collections” category of choice then desire recipe. Enter desired number of servings.)



Ideas to Liven up Your Menus

- Don't be afraid to mix things up and try a nutritious snack instead of a traditional meal when you are short on time or energy. For example, spread a brown rice cake with ricotta cheese and fresh strawberries or herbed goat cheese and sliced olives.
- 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.
- Use planned-over macaroni to make pasta salad or quick casseroles. Add planned-over vegetables or meat.
- Make mini-pizzas by topping English muffins with planned-over spaghetti sauce, vegetables and shredded cheese.
- Add chopped onions, mushrooms, peppers and cooked meat to canned spaghetti sauce. Serve spaghetti sauce over noodles one day, then add kidney beans and chili seasoning for another meal.
- Top a microwave -baked potato with planned-over chili and cheese.
- Mix chopped yellow squash, green peas and grated carrots with a prepared rice mix.
- Spice up canned tomato soup by adding a chopped green onion, celery and some garlic powder.

Breakfast Ideas

- Microwave oatmeal: ½ cup oats, 1 cup water and pinch of cinnamon. Microwave for 3 minutes on high (covered) and then add ½ cup skim milk. Serve with fruit
- Blender smoothie made with 1% of nonfat milk, fresh or frozen fruit, yogurt, honey, dry milk powder and ice cubes.
- Lowfat yogurt topped with a high fiber cereal with fresh berries

Lunch Ideas

- Bowl of vegetable soup served with whole grain crackers
- Lowfat cheese sandwich made on whole wheat bread with lettuce and tomato.

- Peanut butter and sliced banana sandwich on whole wheat bread

Dinner Ideas

- Cold rice salad made with leftover cooked rice, peas, diced peppers, chopped peanuts, corn kernels, diced turkey, and low-fat dressing.
- Bowl of pinto beans with added peppers, onions, and diced tomatoes served with whole wheat tortillas
- Soyburger on a bun with lowfat cheese, lettuce, tomato and onion.

Snacks

- Whole grain low-fat crackers spread with peanut butter and topped with raisins.
- Whole wheat crackers and fruit.
- A glass of nonfat milk, fruit or vegetable juice will help balance out these small meals and snacks.
- Vegetables from the grocery store salad bar are ready to eat and can last a few days if covered and refrigerated properly.

References:

- North Dakota State University Extension bulletin "Cooking For One or Two"
- University of Nebraska Extension "Planning Healthy Meals for One or Two—a Checklist"
- Food Safety.gov
- Mayo Clinic—"Healthy Cooking for 1 or 2"
- Colorado State University Extension "Meals for One or Two"
- Wildcat Extension District, Barbara Ames, Family and Consumer Science Agent "Meals for One or Two" and "Meals for One or Two"
- Food and Health communications—"Cooking and eating alone"
- Taste of Home—"Cooking for One or Two"

