

# Cooking For One or Two...

Enjoy and make the most of every Meal!

The secret of making cooking for one fun and creative is not to think of a meal as self-contained but to understand that home cooking is an ongoing process, one dish leading to another. When you do your grocery shopping, visualize the week ahead. How many meals am I going to be eating at home?

Planning and quantity are the keys! You have to be willing to plan!

There is a lot of research that indicates when you cook at home the quality of your diet is better.

**1.Meal Planning** ~ Take time to jot down the week's menu and a shopping list. Think about the entire week of cooking, not just one recipe. You'll find it makes your grocery shopping easier and ensures that you have everything you need when you're ready to cook.

By **planning menus** before grocery shopping, you can take advantage of "family pack" or "two for one" specials, especially if it's a food you really enjoy eating.

## **You must be intentional!**

Having a long-term mindset, or that sense that cooking with a whole week in mind allows you to more easily create a quick and healthy meal with what you have on hand.

**Planning ahead** each week can save a great deal of time later in the kitchen. Forethought on weekly menus is necessary; a shopping list is mandatory. Check those items you have on hand to ensure there are adequate quantities already available and that the items are fresh and of good quality.

Meals should be planned for overall ease of preparation with the least amount of leftovers possible (unless this is intended). Combine make ahead dishes with fast or easy recipes. When choosing dishes, be sure to read the recipes from start to finish. Make changes as

needed, especially if modifying your recipes (i.e. decreasing fat, sodium, sugar, etc.) and remember to adjust your shopping list as well.

**2. Stock your pantry** ~ A well stocked pantry of key condiments and items that have a long shelf life will make it easier to put together some great dishes.

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

### **Pantry**

1. Jarred tomato pasta sauce and canned tomatoes
2. Dried pasta
3. White and whole grain rice
4. Low-sodium chicken broth
5. Peanut butter
6. Canned beans (such as chickpeas, cannellinis, kidneys) and/or dried
7. Dry breadcrumbs
8. Extra-virgin olive oil
9. Dried herbs and spices
10. Onions and potatoes (sweet and regular)
11. Oatmeal, bulgar, couscous, barley, polenta
12. Dried fruits
13. Nuts
14. Flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder

### **Refrigerator**

1. Fresh herbs
2. Eggs
3. Butter
4. Plain yogurt
5. Milk
6. Cheeses (such as cheddar, Parmesan, and mozzarella)
7. Lemons
8. Condiments (such as Dijon mustard, ketchup, BBQ sauce, mayonnaise, and soy sauce)
9. Jams (such as strawberry, raspberry, and apricot)
10. Salad greens

### **Freezer:**

1. Gingerroot
2. Bacon (divide into individual servings)
3. Boneless, skinless chicken breasts (I like to leave some whole and cut some into strips and others cubed for easy use.)
4. Ground beef (divided into 1-pound portions)
5. Boneless pork chops
6. Frozen vegetables (such as spinach, broccoli florets, peas, and mixed vegetables)
7. Peeled and deveined shrimp
8. Pizza dough
9. Frozen fruits (such as strawberries, blueberries, pineapple, and mango)
10. Most tomato based pasta sauces freeze well, so you can make a full batch and then freeze the leftover sauce in ziplock bags individual portions or ice cube trays
11. Ice cream!!

**3. Take advantage of your freezer** ~ Buy in bulk and freeze in smaller quantities that you can thaw and cook for one or two meals. You may be surprised to learn that you can also 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. Know proper storage techniques.

You can also buy large cuts of meat, such as roasts or hams and divide them into meal-size portions. Prepare and consume one portion immediately. Wrap the remaining portions in an airtight container, label and freeze for later use.

**Cook a batch and freeze single portions.** For example, make a casserole or stew and freeze individual-size servings. Then take out only the amount of food you need. Be sure to write the date and contents on packages and move older packages forward as you add food to your freezer.

**Buy the RIGHT groceries!** Serving good meals for a few begins with buying the right groceries.

Certain meats come in individual servings or can easily be divided. They include ground meats and poultry; steaks and chops; bacon, sausages, shellfish.

Purchase individually frozen foods or buy in bulk and repackage in individual serving sizes (Chicken parts or breasts)

**Look for foods that are individually frozen, so that you only need to thaw out the portion that you are going to use.** If you thaw a whole chicken, you only have a few days to eat it. If you buy chicken breasts that are individually frozen, you can thaw them one at a time if you want. Make and freeze your own chicken and turkey cutlets

**Double batch cooking** gives you two meals with one preparation time. Cook a full recipe. Serve one portion now and freeze the rest. Foods that have been frozen in cooking bags (**Food Saver Bags**) can be taken directly from the freezer to the oven. Prepared casseroles that have been frozen in aluminum foil need to have the cooking time increased by one half.

**4. Prepare one-dish meals~** For quick and simple cooking, choose a dish that serves as the whole meal. (Salmon and Basmati Rice) 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. If you have prepped your veggies ahead of time, assembling your meal will be easier.

**I like to prep my veggies** when I get home from the store that I'm going to use for a few days. I will dice up an onion, and put it in a container. Prep, say, a green, a red, and yellow pepper. Then use the pre prepped veggie the next couple days in dishes like, a western omelet for brunch, sausage and peppers, fried rice, or a sauté. Same prepped veggie, but changing up the proteins and seasonings gives you variety. Tomatoes- roast large quantities and store covered in olive oil in frig.

**5. Use extras wisely**~ Plan meals so that you can use the extra food in new dishes. **Liven up your menus with these ideas:**  
**Use Your Leftovers/“Planned-overs” Creatively**

**“Use it or lose it”**

### **Practice FIFO**

Remember to practice the FIFO principle in your kitchen—first in, first out. Make sure to use the products that expire the soonest first. This seems elementary, but many people do not practice this. Also make sure to eat your most perishable produce first (ie, berries before apples).

**Instead of trying to keep everything fresh and raw until the clock is counting down toward mealtime and then fitting it into a predetermined recipe, cook everything as soon as you get home from the market.** Not all in a jumble or stew, but separately and in ways that maximize each item’s potential. ( Braise greens, roast veggies, blanch carrots, green beans and broccoli then freeze them at their peak ( food saver bags), roast a whole chicken rather than a breast - eat off it for days in various ways and use the carcass for simple chicken soup)

Think about yesterday’s roast vegetables not as leftovers, but as ingredients. The best way to cook isn’t to read a recipe, run out and get all the stuff and then start cooking. Instead, start wherever you are, use what you have.

Utilize salad bars because a person can get small amounts of fresh vegetables.

•**Cook rice** as a side dish for one meal, then use the remainder in a casserole or rice pudding, rice salad, fried rice, stir fry, black beans and rice with sautéed veggies and cheese

Every rice-eating country seems to have its share of cooked-rice dishes. Rice is a great carrier, and you need never tire of it, because there are so many different ways of using it that reflect the country of origin. Make Thai fried rice with dry day old rice or a sweet rice pudding

• **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 freeze the uncooked portion to use later in stuffed peppers or for meatballs

• **A Roast Chicken** can be used for more than one meal.

• Baked chicken breasts prepared for dinner on Monday can be used on Tuesday chopped up on a salad or in a chicken salad sandwich. Use leftovers to make chicken salad, the carcass to make chicken soup. You can also use shredded chicken in a lot of Asian dishes or in a salad.

• Cook **chicken** once a week, but use it in two or three dishes over the next few days. You can even freeze some of the cooked chicken for use at another time.

• **Chili** that is prepared for dinner can be used as a baked potato topping the next day for lunch.

• Making a **small roast** on Sunday could provide the planned-over meat for a sandwich on Monday and a vegetable beef stir-fry on Tuesday.

• **Fish** ~Use up the leftovers the next day or so in a crispy fish cake, or a fish salad, or combined with other seafood to make a fish soup, a pasta, or a risotto, it comes to life again.

• add **leftover fruit** to muffin, 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, croutons, or bread crumbs, bread salad

• Use **planned-over meat** in tacos, soup or stir-fry, or on salads.

• **Extra Veggies** ~ cooked spinach, or the three or four extra spears of asparagus you couldn't quite finish, and particularly the little bit of precious juice left in the pan—all these can be used in myriad ways

and offer the single home cook some creative challenges. Frittatas, omelets, frittatas, soups, sauté for pasta

**6. Sauté** Learn to love your sauté pan. It's perfect for cooking individual-sized meals like a single steak, fish filet, veal, lamb chop, pork or chicken breast.

Make a zesty sauce, steam some asparagus or green beans, and dinner is served. You can also sauté the veggies in the pan for a one-pot meal that is tasty and easy to clean up.

## **7. Reduce Your Favorite Recipes**

**Try these tips to help reduce your recipes:**

- Choose recipes that are easy to divide math. In recipes calling for three eggs, use two eggs and remove 2 to 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!

## **8. Start a cooking club**

If you know other single people and/or couples who like to try new foods, consider starting a cooking club, where each member takes turns preparing a full recipe of an agreed-upon dish and divides it up among the whole group.

## Reducing Recipes.

Making Half a Recipe

When the recipe calls for:

1/4 cup.....	2 Tablespoons
1/3 cup.....	2 Tablespoons and 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 egg = 3 Tablespoons