

Cooking for One

Sue Flanagan, WVU Extension Agent – Berkeley County
Cheryl Kaczor, WVU Extension Agent – Marshall County

Think about forming a supper club with other singles from work, church, your family or neighborhood. Arrange to share the cooking duties and enjoy each other's company.

One- and two-person households are the fastest-growing segment of our nation's population. Whether young or old, if you fit this category, you may feel challenged to meet nutritional needs while preparing smaller quantity meals. Being motivated to cook can be a problem, too. However, meals prepared at home are typically more nutritious and less expensive than purchased meals.

There are other benefits of cooking meals for one. You can eat your favorite foods and experiment with new foods, techniques and recipes. You may be able to afford an occasional treat, like out-of-season fruit or a more expensive cut of meat. If you follow a special diet, you can accommodate any changes more easily.

It might seem easier to resort to fast food or a bowl of cereal for dinner, but remember that it is important at every age to meet your nutritional requirements to maintain good health. Cooking at home can be quick and simple with a few planning steps.

Meal Planning

Meal planning is crucial for saving time and money, and it aids in meeting your nutritional needs. It doesn't need to be time consuming and will become easier each week. Here's a helpful checklist:

- Make a list of foods you like. Look through cookbooks, magazines and online recipe banks for new ideas.
- Map out the meals for each day of the week, including side dishes, desserts and snacks.
- Incorporate foods and ingredients you have on hand in the pantry, refrigerator or freezer.
- Plan around activities you have already scheduled, such as working late or an evening out.



– continued –

- Use grocery advertisements and coupons to help determine what to prepare, where to find the best bargains and how much of an item to purchase.

- Create a shopping list.

A detailed menu for the week is not necessary, but you might appreciate reminders such as your intention to use specific leftovers for lunch.

Planned-overs

When you do have time and energy to cook, make an extra amount (called “planned-overs”) to incorporate in a later meal. For example, cook extra macaroni for pasta salad and casseroles.

You can even make extra meals or cook larger quantities to freeze for later. When chicken is on sale, you can wrap pieces individually and



freeze for thawing and cooking later. Or you could bake several for planned use during the week. If there is too much to use within four days, you can easily freeze the remaining cooked chicken. Many foods freeze well.

If you prepared a full meal with protein and vegetables, you could portion out an extra plate for heating up in a day or two – or divide it into servings and freeze. There are food-safe freezable containers in single-portion sizes at most grocery stores.

Enhance Purchased Meals

You can use prepared frozen meals, which are convenient and reasonably priced. As you read the nutritional facts label, you will discover that not all frozen meals are nutritionally balanced. An easy solution is to enhance those meals by adding vegetables, fresh fruit or a salad to fill in those nutritional gaps.

Consider adding chopped yellow squash, green peas or grated carrots to a prepared rice mix or to canned soup. When cooking brown rice or noodles, add vegetables for the final few minutes of cooking time.

Finally, make your mealtime a special time and create a pleasant background. Listen to relaxing music and use your fancy dishes and glasses. Add a colorful placemat or centerpiece and light some candles. Invite a friend, neighbor or family member over to enjoy a meal together if you have a recipe you enjoy or a new one to try.

Mini Meatloaves

Yield: 6 servings

Mini meatloaves are an example of a recipe that you can make and freeze for later.

1 pound lean ground beef or ground turkey 1 ½ cups salsa divided in half

1 egg, lightly beaten ¼ cup dry bread crumbs
¼ cup chopped onion Dash black pepper

Heat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Combine all ingredients in a large mixing bowl, using half of the salsa. Spray a six-cup muffin pan with nonstick cooking spray. Divide the meat mixture into six equal portions and place in prepared pan. Spoon remaining salsa on top of each muffin. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes.

You can freeze the meatloaves in the pan before baking. Remove them from the pan when frozen solid. Wrap each frozen meatloaf in plastic wrap, foil or a small freezer bag, then slide all into a labeled freezer bag – or bake the meatloaves and package when cool as directed above. Use the pre-baked meatloaves within a month or the unbaked ones within six months.

Nutritional facts per serving: 125 calories, 3.8 total grams fat, 6 grams carbohydrates, less than 1 gram dietary fiber and 143 milligrams sodium.

Recipe from “*Cooking with EFNEP*,” North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University Cooperative Extension

2016

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.

The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing, and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities.

FH16-349

