

Planning Healthy Meals for One or Two

Sometimes, it can be hard to get motivated when cooking a meal for just one or two people. Here is a checklist to help you get the most value for your time and money if you are cooking for two, or just you!

General Tips

Maximize your nutrition!

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.
- Make at least half of your grains whole grains.

Cook once, eat twice

- Plan two meals from the same entrée. Separate out extra food BEFORE serving.
- Eat extras in 3–4 days or freeze.
- Many recipes can be cut in half or thirds.

Shopping Tips

Should you buy in bulk?

- Bulk food may be half the cost but just as expensive if you toss half!
- Smaller packages help avoid eating the same food over and over.
- Repackage meat in freezer bags for smaller servings and freeze.

Consider individually packaged servings of items if you frequently have leftovers such as:

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

Buy a smaller number of servings from meat counter

- Enjoy one pork chop.
- Purchase a single salmon filet.
- Explore a different cut of beef.

Purchase fruit at varying stages of ripeness

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

Buy frozen vegetables in bags

- Pour only what you need.
- Use within 8 months or per package guidelines.
- Toss into soups and casseroles.
- Taste and nutrition is comparable to fresh.
- Often lower in salt than canned veggies.

Can-do canned foods

- Nutrition is comparable to fresh or frozen.
- No refrigerator space needed.
- Helpful in emergency; have manual can opener handy.
- Check the "use by date" on cans for best safety/quality. After can is opened, use within 3–4 days.
- Low sodium versions are available.



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Storage Tips

Refrigerator storage tips

- Refrigerate hot foods in a shallow pan — food should be no more than 2 inches deep.
- Eat perishable foods in 3–4 days; heat until steaming hot (165°F).
- Thaw frozen packages on a plate in refrigerator near bottom so they don't drip on other foods.

Freezer storage tips

- Store it, don't ignore it — food is "safe" indefinitely at 0°F but "quality" lowers over time.
- Use freezer quality containers for freezer storage.
- It is safest to thaw foods in the fridge. It takes about 24 hours to thaw 5 pounds of food.
- Foods that don't freeze well include watery foods such as cabbage, celery or lettuce, cream or custard fillings, milk sauces, sour cream, cheese or crumb toppings, mayonnaise, gelatin, and fried foods.
- Store bread in freezer. Remove a slice at a time and toast as needed.

Restaurant Tips

Take advantage of large restaurant portions

- Two meals for price of one! Divide meal in half BEFORE eating.
- Refrigerate perishables in shallow containers within 2 hours of service.

Reducing Recipe Size

Recipes can frequently be successfully reduced by 1/2 to 1/3. Helpful equivalents include:

- 1 cup = 16 tablespoons
- 1 tablespoon = 3 teaspoons
- 1 cup = 8 fluid ounces (measuring cups measure volume, not weight)
- 1 fluid ounce = 2 tablespoons
- 1 pound = 16 ounces (weight)
- 1 pint = 2 cups
- 1 quart = 2 pints

To change 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°F if substituting glass for metal pan

Turkey or Chicken Soup

- 2 carrots, diced
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ¼ cup chopped celery
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- Dash of pepper
- 2 cups low sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup chopped, cooked turkey or chicken
- 1 cup cooked pasta OR 1 cup cooked rice



1. Wash hands with soap and water. Scrub vegetables with clean vegetable brush under running water before dicing or chopping.
2. Add all ingredients, except pasta or rice to pan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to a simmer and cook covered until vegetables are tender crisp, about 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Add cooked pasta or cooked rice and cook a few more minutes until pasta or rice is heated.
4. Store leftovers in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to four days. Makes 2 servings. Each contains: Calories 270, Total Fat 4.5g, Saturated Fat 1g, Sodium 500mg, Carbohydrates 29g, Fiber 3g, Total Sugars 7g.

Sources:

1. Freezing and Food Safety, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): <https://bit.ly/3puzmC2>
2. Refrigeration and Food Safety, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): <https://bit.ly/3IC20Zk>