

Healthy Eating for One (or two)

By April Hamilton, Nutrition Educator, Riverside County Office on Aging

Many of us find ourselves having to cook for ourselves – sometimes for the first time. It is important to eat nutritious, balanced meals and snacks. Calorie intake will vary with age and activity level. Calorie intake for older adults should be approximately 1600 calories on average, with very active men getting up to 2200 calories.

When we eat fast foods or frozen dinners, the calories add up fast, along with other unwanted fats and salts. For example, if you have a *Whopper with Cheese*, medium fries and a medium soda, you have racked up almost 1400 calories in one meal! Then at night, you have a frozen Salisbury Steak Dinner and that's 800 more calories PLUS and 500 of those are coming from unwanted fat.

Cooking healthy meals for yourself can help you control your calories. If you cook a dinner yourself, that is equivalent to the frozen Salisbury Steak Dinner, the total calories can be less than 500 and only about 100 of those coming from fat.

Nutritious, balanced meals and snacks can be easy to prepare. Many healthy, easy meals can be found in magazines, grocery stores, cookbooks, on food products, and by sharing with friends. On the Internet, the "Nutrition, Cooking and Recipes" section of Vital Connections <www.vitalco.net> features many websites including some on how to cook, information on reducing the size of recipes to help those who are cooking only for themselves, tips on buying and storing food and recipes for special diets or gourmet food adventures. A pamphlet from the American Institute for Cancer Research, offers helpful tips on cooking titled "Cooking Solo". Call 1-800-843-8114 to order a copy. Enjoy yourself and make the most of your meals!

Also, planning meals will help get more nutritious food for the same or less money. Here are some tips on shopping and meal planning:

- Plan meals for the week in advance and make a shopping list. This will help from overspending on extra foods.
- Take care when buying bulk foods. Buy foods that can be easily separated and frozen in small amounts for use in various recipes and meals.
- Make small dishes of casseroles, enchiladas, lasagna and other baked dishes that can be frozen for later meals.
- Buy frozen, canned or packaged fruits. Freeze (if possible) fresh fruits and vegetables if they must be bought in larger quantities than you will use to save from spoiling and wasting. Buy fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season since they tend to cost less. Check with produce department to have heads of lettuce, cabbage and other leafy greens cut in halves.



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- Cook pots of beans (chili, pinto, kidney, black eyed peas) and freeze in small portions to use in casseroles, soups, chili, beans and rice, salads and other recipes.
- Use leftover meats and side dishes for use in next day's meals. Use chicken breasts in salad. Use chili for topping baked potato.
- Keep staples on hand to be prepared for emergencies: canned soups, frozen juice, instant potatoes, cereal, bread in freezer, peanut butter, frozen fruit and vegetables, dried or canned beans, crackers, rice, and pasta.

Reduce recipes by half or thirds. Common conversions:

<i>1/4 cup</i>	<i>2 tablespoons</i>
<i>1/3 cup</i>	<i>2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons</i>
<i>1/2 cup</i>	<i>1/4 cup</i>
<i>2/3 cup</i>	<i>1/3 cup</i>
<i>3/4 cup</i>	<i>6 tablespoons</i>
<i>1 tablespoon</i>	<i>1 1/2 teaspoon</i>
<i>1 teaspoon</i>	<i>1/2 teaspoon</i>
<i>1/2 teaspoon</i>	<i>1/4 teaspoon</i>
<i>Third of Recipe</i>	
<i>1/4 cup</i>	<i>1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon</i>
<i>1/3 cup</i>	<i>1 tablespoon + 2 1/3 teaspoons</i>
<i>1/2 cup</i>	<i>2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons</i>

For some of us, eating by ourselves can be a problem. Here are some



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suggestions to help us look forward to meals:

- Use the “good” dishes
- Eat by candlelight
- Play your favorite music
- Invite a friend over
- Have dinner with your grandchild
- Make family recipes and share with friends

Socialization with others helps to keep the blues away and may lead to friendly supportive relationships.

Try some other things to make life more exciting. Take a cooking class at the local senior center or community college. Enjoy meals at senior congregate meal sites that provide nutritious meals and the opportunity to socialize with others.

**TRY THIS EASY,
HEALTHY RECIPE:**

Vegetarian Minestrone

1/4 cup diced onion

1/4 cup diced celery

1/4 cup diced mushrooms

1/2 cup canned, Italian-style diced tomatoes

1 cup canned white beans, rinsed and drained

2 Tbsp. elbow macaroni

2 cups fat-free, reduced sodium chicken or vegetable broth

1/4 tsp. basil

1/4 tsp. oregano

Salt and pepper, to taste (optional)

In medium saucepan, combine all ingredients except salt and pepper. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered 15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

2 servings. Per serving: 206 calories, 39 g. carbohydrates, 8 g. dietary fiber, <1 g. total fat (< 1 g. saturated fat), 13 g. protein, 686 mg. sodium.

SOME USEFUL COOKING TIPS

- **If a soup or stew is too salty, add raw cut potatoes. Discard them after they have cooked - they will have absorbed the salt.**
- **A fresh egg will sink in water, a stale one will float. For light, fluffy scrambled eggs, add a little water while beating the eggs.**
- **Store celery and lettuce in paper bags, not plastic. And leave the outside leaves and stalks alone until ready to use.**



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- Sunlight doesn't ripen tomatoes, warmth does. Store tomatoes with stems pointed down and they will stay fresher, longer.
- Remove fat from soups and stews by dropping ice cubes into the pot. The fat will cling to the cubes as you stir. Take out the cubes before they melt.
- For fluffier, whiter rice, add 1/4 tsp of lemon juice per cup of cooking water.

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