

400 Laurel Suite 215 • Texarkana, AR, 71854 • 870-779-3609 • www.uaex.edu/miller
chadley@uaex.edu • Facebook & Twitter @millercountyfcs/

Cooking for One or Two?

Carla Hadley
County Extension Agent, Staff Chair/
Family & Consumer Sciences

In our lifetime, many of us will find ourselves in a situation of cooking for one or two. This may be when we leave home to go out on our own, when we get married, when we become empty nesters, or when we experience the loss of a spouse. A long-term illness can also be a time in which a person might be cooking for just one or two. This is not something that happens just to women; men often find themselves having to cook for one or two persons. This can be a hardship, especially if they are not familiar with meal preparation.

Nutrition still important

Although a person may be preparing foods on a smaller scale, nutrition is still of utmost importance. It is sometimes better to cook a smaller amount of one food than to fix a full recipe of a food and continue reheating it until it is gone. We get tired of that food and do not get a balanced diet of all the foods we need.

The nutrition facts label on the package can be a valuable source of information. The label tells you serving sizes and amounts in the container. The label also gives information about nutrition in the food and the number of calories in each serving. This information will help you stay within the range of calories you are to consume each day.

Changes as we age

As we age, we find that foods don't taste as good as they once did, our eyesight isn't as good, and food preparation is more difficult. Foods don't smell as savory as they should, so we are tempted not to eat as well as we once did. Medications may affect the taste buds so that foods don't seem as tasty as they once were. Changes in our bodies, such as loss of teeth or changes in the digestive system may mean we don't eat the foods we once did.

Turning to a multivitamin is not the answer, although multivitamins can be helpful. Many nutrients are easy to obtain with delicious foods. A quickly swallowed multivitamin still leaves us with the need to "eat with our eyes," to smell the flavorful aromas of foods, and to enjoy the stimulation of actually eating.

Plan ahead

Cooking for one or two can be a challenge, but it can also be fun! This might be the time you could try foods you have not eaten before, buy foods that might not have been in your budget, or entertain and have a variety of foods you may not have served at another time. Planning meals will help when you shop. You will know that you need to buy a whole bag of apples, but only a couple of potatoes, for instance. One great advantage is buying

frozen foods in large, recloseable packages. You can take out what you need and reseal the package to use another day.

Shopping with family or friends will allow you to purchase things together, share the cost, and not be as concerned about spoilage. Purchase herbs and spices with someone and share them so they can be used while fresh. Be sure to put a date on them so you know when you bought them. This will also help you know how often you use a particular item. Occasionally, you may want to plan a meal of just leftovers. This gives you a chance to use those foods before they are spoiled and not waste money.

Food preparation can be expensive. There is a greater potential for waste when you cook smaller amounts. Planning ahead can help you save money. Looking at the food ads in newspapers and store flyers will let you see what foods are going to be on sale at special prices for the next week. This is a good time to sit down and put meals together on paper so that you have an idea of what you need to buy and where you can get the best prices for the foods you need. It is also a good time to check on the foods you have on hand so you can use them while they are still fresh.

Preparation ideas – even for 1 or 2

Sharing meals with persons in the same situation is a way of breaking the monotony of eating the same foods and eating alone. Putting meals together with friends and neighbors is an economical, interesting, and practical means of getting more well-balanced meals. If you have a pretty plate, you may want to use that to make mealtime more inviting.

Eating at the dining room table, rather than in front of the television can make mealtime special. Adding a special bouquet of flowers, a pretty decoration, or holiday arrangements can also make the surroundings more appealing. Soft music can help mealtime become a special time. These “gimmicks” will help you find mealtime more pleasant. Eating right does not mean eating more, but rather eating the foods you need to obtain the greatest health benefit.

Because you are cooking small amounts of food, you may be able to buy foods you can't afford in larger quantities. Saving money on some meals will allow you the opportunity to buy foods you might not have otherwise considered. It may allow you to purchase foods out of season when they are a bit more expensive.

Don't forget safety

Keeping you and your foods safe is also of utmost importance. Even small quantities of improperly handled food can cause foodborne illness. Follow all the basic food safety procedures to keep the food you prepare safe and to keep you healthy.

Sharing – even if you cook for more than two

Even people who prepare larger amounts of food can share with those who cook for just one or two. Such persons often delight in getting to join a family setting. They remember what fun families can be and how tasty foods can be when shared with other people.

Reducing recipes

Most recipes can be cut in half or in thirds. For easy references, see the chart below. Some ingredients are difficult to divide, such as an egg. If the recipe you want to cut in half calls for a large egg, try using a small egg or just the egg white. In some cases, it may be easier to make the entire recipe and freeze the rest for later.

Reducing Recipes	
Half of a Recipe	
<i>When the recipe calls for</i>	<i>Use</i>
¼ cup	2 tablespoons
⅓ cup	2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons
½ cup	¼ cup
⅔ cup	⅓ cup
¾ cup	6 tablespoons
1 tablespoon	1 ½ teaspoon
1 teaspoon	½ teaspoon
½ teaspoon	¼ teaspoon
Third of a Recipe	
¼ cup	1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon
⅓ cup	1 tablespoon + 2 ⅓ teaspoons
½ cup	2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons

Crock-Pot Chicken and Noodles

4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts	½ teaspoon garlic powder
1 can cream of chicken soup	8 ounces sour cream
1 can cream of mushroom soup	1 package egg noodles
¼ cup flour	

Cut the chicken breasts into thin strips and put on the bottom of the crock-pot. Combine soups and garlic powder; pour over chicken. Cook on high setting for about three to four hours or on the low setting for seven to nine hours. About 30 minutes before serving, combine the flour and sour cream. Stir into the chicken mixture. Cook about 30 minutes more. Cook egg noodles according to package directions and serve. Freeze leftovers in single serving containers for later meals.

Dinner Omelet

Use whatever vegetables or cheese you like or have on hand in this easy recipe.

4 eggs	½ cup coarsely chopped mushrooms
¼ cup milk	⅓ cup chopped tomato
⅛ teaspoon salt	2 tablespoons minced onion
Pepper to taste	½ cup shredded cheese
1 tablespoon margarine	

Combine eggs, milk, salt and pepper in a small bowl and beat well to mix. Place large nonstick skillet over medium high heat and melt margarine in it. Pour egg mixture into the skillet. Reduce heat to low and cook eggs, pulling eggs to center of pan as they cook with a rubber spatula and gently lifting cooked portion to mix. Cook until eggs are set but top is still shiny. Sprinkle the vegetables and cheese over. Fold omelet in half using the rubber spatula. Cover and let cook 1 minute longer to melt cheese. 2 servings.

Layered Enchilada Casserole

1 cup salsa verde	½ cup chopped red pepper
½ cup low-fat sour cream	Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ cup fat-free, reduced-sodium chicken broth	Hot sauce, to taste
1 (15 ounce) can black beans, rinsed & drained	6 (6-inch) corn tortillas, cut in half
1 ½ cups frozen corn, thawed	1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese*
½ cup chopped red onion	
½ cup chopped green pepper	

*may substitute reduced-fat Monterey Jack cheese for the Cheddar.

Preheat oven to 350°F. In small bowl, whisk together salsa, sour cream and broth. Set aside. In medium bowl, mix together beans, corn, onion, and peppers. Season to taste with salt, black pepper and hot sauce.

Spread ¼ cup sauce over bottom of 9-inch baking pan.** Layer bottom with 4 corn tortilla halves. Sprinkle 1/3 of bean and corn mixture over tortillas. Drizzle ½ cup of sauce mixture evenly over top. Sprinkle with 1/3 cup cheese. Repeat layering process twice, topping bean and corn mixture with remaining sauce and cheese. Bake for 40 minutes until hot and bubbly. Makes 6 servings.

**Or prepare in single serving sizes, label, date, and freeze to cook later.

White Bean Soup with Rotini

This is a mild soup that can spice up with a touch of cayenne pepper, if desired

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil	1 teaspoon dried oregano
½ cup thinly sliced onion	¾ cup rotini pasta noodles, whole wheat
2 cups kale (or spinach) leaves, cut into bite-size pieces	black pepper, to taste
1 (15 ounce) can white beans, rinsed & drained	Cayenne pepper, to taste (opt.)
2 (15 ounce) cans fat-free, reduced-sodium chicken broth	

In large saucepan set over medium heat, sauté onion in oil for 3 minutes, stirring often. Add kale or spinach & sauté another minute. Add beans, chicken broth and oregano. Bring to boil. Add rotini and cook, covered, until noodles are tender (check package instructions for time). Before serving, season with pepper and cayenne to taste. Makes 3 servings.

Mini-Pizzas

2 (6-inch) pizza crusts OR 2 English muffins, split	½ cup sliced pepperoni*
½ cup pizza sauce	1 ½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese
3 green onions, chopped	

*or toppings of your choice

Heat oven to 400° F. Spread pizza sauce over crusts (if using English muffins, split and toast first). Top with remaining ingredients. Bake at 400°F for 8-10 minutes, until cheese melts and crust is golden brown on top. Makes 2 servings.

All-Purpose Homemade Tomato Sauce

Add frozen vegetables, canned mushrooms or sautéed fresh veggies just before serving this easy, basic sauce.

1 tablespoon olive oil	2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley, OR
½ cup finely chopped sweet onion	2 teaspoon dried parsley
1 tablespoon water	2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil, OR
2 large cloves garlic, minced	2 teaspoon dried basil
1 (28 ounce) “no salt added” crushed tomatoes	Salt & black pepper, to taste
1 tablespoon “no salt added” tomato paste	

In large pot or Dutch oven, heat oil over medium-low heat. Add onion and sauté, stirring constantly for 1 minute. Add water and continue sautéing until onion is translucent. Add garlic, stirring, and sauté another minute. Add tomatoes, tomato paste, herbs, salt and pepper. Stir, cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer for 15-20 minutes. Turn off heat and let sit for 10 minutes. Taste and re-season, if necessary. Makes 6 servings.

Chili ~ Add chili powder, cilantro and canned, rinsed and drained kidney beans. Garnish with chopped raw onion and shredded cheddar cheese.

Casseroles ~ Add chopped leftover meat, poultry or fish (3 ounce per serving) plus a layer of pasta or brown rice. Sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese and bake for 20 minutes.

Pasta or Rice ~ Add cubed tofu, poultry, meat or fish. Toss with chopped vegetables to serve over whole wheat pasta or brown rice.

Sweet Potatoes with Cranberries & Pecans

This succulent potato dish has plenty of nutrients and is easy to make. Store leftovers in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

2 teaspoons canola oil	Olive or Canola oil spray
2 teaspoons maple syrup	¼ cup chopped pecans
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon	¼ cup dried cranberries
¼ teaspoon salt	
1 medium sweet potato, peeled, cut into ½ inch slices	

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place potatoes in medium bowl. In small bowl, whisk together oil, maple syrup, cinnamon and salt. Pour onto potato slices and toss with spoon to coat evenly.

Coat small casserole dish with oil spray and layer with half of the potatoes. Top evenly with half of the pecans and half of the cranberries. Cover with remaining potatoes. Sprinkle remaining pecans and cranberries on top of potatoes. Cover and bake for 30 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Makes 4 servings.

Mini Meatloaves

Freeze these in individual portions, then thaw and reheat.
From Cook Smart Eat Smart Cookbook

1 lb. lean ground beef (or ground turkey)	¼ cup finely chopped onion
1 ½ cups mild or medium salsa, divided	½ teaspoon salt
1 egg, lightly beaten	dash of black pepper
½ cup dry bread crumbs	non-stick cooking spray

Heat oven to 350°F for 20 minutes. Combine all ingredients, saving half of the salsa for topping. Divide meat mixture into 5 equal portions. Shape into flattened loaves. Spray baking dish with non-stick cooking spray. Place loaves in dish. Spoon half of the remaining salsa on top of loaves. Bake for 250 minutes. Take out of the oven and spoon remaining salsa over top and bake an additional 10 minutes.

This recipe can also be made in one loaf pan by increasing cooking time to one hour or can be made in muffin tins, decreasing cooking time.

Makes 5 servings with each serving having 250 calories, 9 g total fat, 30 g protein, 11 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber and 140 mg sodium

Energy Snack Mix

These can be packaged in individual sized bags to grab and eat on the run.
From Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program

1 cup Crunchy Honey Oats™	1 cup Frosted Miniwheats™
1 cup Frosted Cheerios™	1 cup raisins

Place all cereal and raisins in a bowl and mix.

½ cup mix offers 110 calories, 0 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 65 mg sodium, 26 g carbohydrates, 2g fiber, and 2 g protein

Cream of Broccoli Soup

From Eating Smart Being Active Cookbook

1 (10 oz.) package frozen, chopped broccoli *	1 soup can of milk
1 (8 oz.) can carrots or mixed vegetables, drained*	¼ to ½ cup shredded cheese
1 (10 oz.) can cream of mushroom soup	

In a saucepan, prepare broccoli according to directions; drain. Add carrots, cream of mushroom soup, and one can of milk to the broccoli. Stir over low heat until steaming hot and vegetables are cooked. Add cheese, stirring until melted. Serve hot. Refrigerate leftovers. Makes 4 (1 cup) servings.

*You may substitute 2 cups cooked, fresh broccoli for the frozen and/or 1 cup frozen carrots or mixed vegetables instead of canned.

1 cup offers 190 calories, 9 g fat, 25 mg cholesterol, 520 mg sodium, 19 g carbohydrates, 4 g fiber, and 11 g protein.

The mention of any commercial product does not imply its endorsement by the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture over other products not named, nor does the omission imply that they are not satisfactory.