

EFFICIENT EATS: COOKING FOR 1, 2, OR 3

Planning and Prepping

Planning and shopping for healthy meals for one person or smaller groups can be easy and cost-effective when done right. These tips will help you prepare delicious, nutritious meals and snacks while reducing food waste and saving time and money. Happy planning!

Have a plan

Start by creating a weekly meal plan - consider ingredients that can be used in multiple recipes to save money and reduce waste.



PRO TIP

Start with a high-quality, nutrient dense protein (e.g. red meat, eggs, poultry, seafood) or plant-source proteins (e.g. beans, peas, lentils) that can be repurposed across meals (e.g., in a soup/ stew/chili, as part of a casserole, for a salad topping).



Make a list

Include a variety of healthy foods and beverages for any meal occasion (e.g., breakfast, snacks). Try organizing your shopping list by category or section of the store.



PRO TIP

Keep your list handy to write down items as you need them (e.g., on the fridge, pantry door, or try a mobile app).

Prep ahead

Set aside time weekly to chop vegetables, wash greens, bake potatoes, cook grains (e.g., rice, quinoa, pasta), and marinate protein foods so that you can quickly and easily put together meals on busy days.



PRO TIP

Label containers with the date and content; use tape or stickers for easy removal.



Portion and store

When you buy items in large packages, like meat or vegetables, portion them into amounts you will eat for each meal occasion and safely store the rest to prevent waste.



PRO TIP

Explore different ways to store and preserve foods (e.g., freezing, drying, and canning), or buy a whole muscle cut of meat and freeze unused portions (e.g. pork loin turned into leftover chops).



Buy only what you need

Shop the bulk section so you can choose the amount of food you need (e.g., oats, lentils, etc.) or buy single servings of perishable items to reduce waste (e.g., individual guacamole packs). You can get small amounts at the deli counter and salad bar too.



PRO TIP

Stock up on favorites when they are on sale. Shelf-stable items like canned beans, pasta, rice, raisins, 100% juice, and peanut butter can be low-cost pantry staples to have on hand for a quick meal or snack.

Be mindful when produce shopping

Fresh fruits and vegetables have a limited shelf life. Balance your cart with nutrient dense options from any section of the store – fresh, dried, canned, frozen, and 100% juice.



PRO TIP

This applies to other food groups too (e.g., tuna canned in water, shelf-stable dairy or dairy alternatives).



Find tips for eating and enjoying all the food groups on [RealFood.gov](https://www.RealFood.gov)