

Cooking at Home Can Help You Save Money, Time and Be Healthy

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March is Nutrition Month and the theme this year is Plan, Shop, Cook and Enjoy! Cooking your own meals might seem like a lot of work, but it doesn't have to be. Read on for tips on making more meals at home.

Keep it simple. Buy one main ingredient. Make three meals.

Plan meals and shop around one main ingredient. Check out these three easy-to-make meals with just one main ingredient: lean ground turkey, beef or chicken.

Brown the ground meat or poultry and then divide into three equal portions for use in:

- Sensational salad- Season browned meat or poultry with a little chili powder, cumin, garlic powder and lime juice. Add to a salad of leafy greens, along with defrosted frozen corn, black beans and chopped tomatoes.
- One-pot pasta- Toss together cooked whole grain pasta, browned meat or poultry, washed baby spinach, a can of diced tomatoes, and minced garlic. Heat until warmed through. Sprinkle with freshly grated Parmesan cheese.
- Simple wrap- Fill a whole grain tortilla with shredded romaine lettuce, sliced red pepper, shredded carrot and lower sodium salsa. Add browned meat or poultry and wrap it up for lunch or dinner.

Get fresh! Fill your cart with more fresh foods, like veggies, yogurt or fish, to cook from scratch.

Cooking meals from scratch allow you to control what goes into them. Packaged meals can be more expensive and less healthy than meals you make at home. Lower your costs by going homemade. Try these fresh ideas to lower the amount of sodium you get, and get cooking.

- Make your own soups, sauces and salad dressings. A little basil combined with crushed tomatoes makes a simple pasta sauce.
- Enjoy more vegetables and fruit. They're naturally sodium free. Whenever possible, use fresh or frozen instead of canned. However if you do buy canned vegetables, rinse them off to lower the sodium. Buy canned fruit that is packed in water or juice, or rinse the syrup off before eating.
- Cook pasta and whole grains, such as rice, barley and quinoa, without adding salt. Try sodium-free chicken broth for delicious flavour.

- Rinse canned beans, peas and lentils to wash away some of the added sodium. Look for sodium-free brands too. Try to use beans in a chili instead of ground beef as these nutritious legumes are packed with good nutrition and they are budget friendly as well.
- Buy plain, unseasoned cuts of fresh meat, poultry or fish. Season lightly at home with herbs and spices.
- Use fresh garlic, flavoured vinegars, herbs or a squeeze of fresh lemon juice to add flavour to food without salt.

Cook 'n' share! Prepare big batches on weekends and swap meals with friends.

Whether you're a busy single person or a time-crunched working parent, swapping meals with friends can save you time in the kitchen. On the weekend, make a large batch of a healthy, easy-to-share meal, such as vegetable lasagna, hearty chili or lentil soup. Split it into portions and share it with a friend or two. They do the same and share with you. You'll get different healthy meals to enjoy during the week but without shopping for ingredients or cooking.

Don't forget about breakfast! You make whole grain pancakes, your friend makes French toast, and then you swap. Refrigerate or freeze the food, and then just pop a piece into the toaster for breakfast. You'll have a quick and healthy breakfast ready to go every day of the week!

Want more ideas?

Visit our website at www.healthunit.org/nutrition for more information and for links to many other online and community resources. You can also contact the Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health Unit's toll-free Health Action Line at 1-800- 660-5853.