



EAT ALONE? MAKE SURE NUTRITION IS YOUR GUEST

Dinner parties, cooking for a crowd, fixing the family meal -- those are easy compared with the challenges of cooking for one. If you live alone, chances are you don't give your meals a lot of thought or preparation.

"Being alone usually means you are just throwing together foods or getting take out," says Althea Zanecosky, R.D., spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. "That can affect your long-term health."

A study of 4,000 men and women over age 55 who lived by themselves found that their diets were low in essential nutrients: vitamin A, vitamin C, some B vitamins and calcium.

But solo eating doesn't have to be bad for you OR boring.



DON'T SKIP BREAKFAST.

Cereals are a good choice for the first meal of the day, particularly if you add milk and fresh fruit. "That's a way to pick up nutrition, and you can watch the news or read the newspaper while you eat," says Ms. Zanecosky. Another breakfast idea is a smoothie, with yogurt, fruit and nonfat dry milk. You can even take that with you as you head out the door on a busy day. Although muffins and bagels are popular breakfast items, cereals are better for you, Ms. Zanecosky says. If you insist on a bagel, try topping it with a little peanut butter for extra nutrition.

BUY SMART BY NOT BUYING TOO MUCH.

"That's the complaint I hear, 'I buy all this food and it sits around and goes bad,'" says Ms. Zanecosky. Instead, buy what you need. Supermarkets are much more "solo-friendly" than they used to be, she says. At the meat

counter, ask for two chicken legs or one salmon steak. In the dairy section, look for a half-dozen eggs. Try individual salads, which don't cost any more than a whole head of lettuce. "If you're buying more and throwing it out, it's not saving you any money," says Ms. Zanecosky.

CHOOSE FOODS THAT WON'T SPOIL.

Buy things that are inexpensive but have a long shelf life, such as yogurt, nonfat dry milk and potatoes. A baked potato -- chock full of nutrients -- can be topped with broccoli, shredded cheese, leftover chili. Add a salad on the side, and you've got an excellent meal in a short amount of time.

SET ASIDE A 'COOKING DAY'.

Make up batches of spaghetti, chili, and bean soup, for instance, and freeze them. You can eat part of one dish one night, have more for lunch the next day, and still have enough for one more meal -- that's three in one.

USE A CROCK POT.

You can start the evening meal in a crockpot before you leave for a busy day. Toss in vegetables, beans and meat and let it cook while you're away. "It will smell wonderful at the end of the day," Ms. Zanecosky says.

KEEP FROZEN, CANNED FOODS ON HAND.

Frozen and canned foods can save time for a quick dinner. You can cook up frozen vegetables in the microwave and serve them over pasta. Or freeze chicken breasts and then cook them in the microwave. "With a microwave, there's no excuse for not eating well," says Ms. Zanecosky. Prepared foods can also work, but Ms. Zanecosky cautions to read the labels carefully. And try to buy them on sale, if you're counting pennies. Frozen entrees offer precise portions, but sometimes they need to be supplemented with a salad and milk for a complete meal.

WATCH PORTIONS.

Know how much of a meal is considered one serving, and then put the rest of the meal away. Or, don't cook more than you will eat at one sitting. Most foods will last a few days in the refrigerator, especially if you place them at the back of the fridge, where it's coldest.

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