



Dinner for One?

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For many of us at some point in our adult lives we will be cooking for just ourselves. For some of us, this means take-out, fast food, or cereal for dinner. But don't let the convenience of take out and fast food derail your health! Eating real, whole foods, is important for everyone.

It is not uncommon for me to hear patients say that they don't like to cook because it seems like a lot of work to do for only one person. Since they are on their own, they don't feel that it is important to cook for themselves. Even those who may have cooked regularly for others in the past find that they move away from cooking when it's just them.

I think a huge challenge for many of us to realize is that even though you're preparing a meal for just yourself, you are worth the time and effort and deserve a good meal. **YOU ARE WORTH IT!** You are worth the effort of it all- planning, prepping, cooking- just because it's just you doesn't make it any less important.

We all know that if you want to feel great and be healthy, you have to eat healthy, nutrient dense foods. You deserve to eat healthy, nutrient dense, real food! Are you getting my drift here? Are you picking up what I'm putting down? Ok then, let's move on.

How

Know yourself.

There are many different strategies you can take when it comes to eating for one. Step #1 is to know yourself. Know what kind of cook you are. What is your cooking style? Do you like spending time in the kitchen or do you want to spend the least amount of time as possible in the kitchen?

If you enjoy cooking, then it might just take some planning ahead and learning how to cut recipes in half. If you don't enjoy cooking, try batch cooking. Spend one or two days a week preparing different items to either heat up or just throw together the rest of the week. For example, you could bake a whole chicken and use the leftovers in different meals each night, like chicken burritos or chicken salad. Or cook a big pot of soup, and freeze in 1 or 2 serving containers. That way you can choose to eat the soup whenever you want and you don't end up eating the same leftovers for 5 days in a row! OR maybe you cook 2-3 times during the week and eat the leftovers the other nights. The biggest part of all this is to **PLAN AHEAD!** If you wait till 6pm to decide what you are eating for dinner that night, it's most likely not going to be something healthy.

You MUST create a meal plan.

It will save you money, stress AND will decrease [food waste](#) (which is one of my biggest pet peeves- its money in the trash!). Having a plan means buying only what you need for the week and using it all up by the end of the week (or however often you want to shop for food). It doesn't have to be complicated. Figure out your cooking style, pick a few recipes, and write down what you need to purchase to make those recipes. Simple!

If you don't want to have a ton of leftovers, learning to scale down recipes is a must. Also having smaller pans, a smaller skillet (6 inch skillet instead of just an 11 inch), a small square Pyrex baking dish instead of just a 9x13 casserole dish, is super helpful. Most recipes serve 4-6, so simply cutting the recipe in half is likely sufficient. It starts to get more complicated if you need to quarter a recipe or more.

Use your freezer!!!

Your freezer will be your best friend! You can freeze leftovers for quick meals in the future, or have ingredients on hand for quick meals (if you forgot to plan). For example, if you have frozen shrimp, frozen broccoli and frozen cooked brown rice, just add some spices and it's a meal in no time!! Freeze soup and sliced bread for another super quick meal ready to go.

Cooking doesn't have to take a long time.

There are plenty of quick and easy, real food recipes out there. After a month or so you will have collected plenty of "go-to" favorites, so just be patient in the beginning and know that your health is worth it!! (YES, I said it again!)

Here are a few of my favorites when I'm cooking for one and don't feel like leftovers:

1. **Burritos!** – like these [Chicken and Black Bean Stuffed Burritos](#) or a similar variation, pair with a frozen vegetable (for a super quick meal) or a quick side salad. Keep whole wheat tortillas in your freezer so you always have some.
2. **Scrambled eggs and greens-** like [Watercress with Garlic and Eggs](#) or a similar variation, you can use any quick cooking green or baby green (I love baby kale or arugula here). This is a great super quick meal, pair with fruit or whole grain toast for a full on meal!
3. **Supper Salad** – there are a million different variations here, you can either purchase ready to use greens or prep your heads of lettuce or other greens ahead of time so they are ready to go. Include any vegetable you have on hand (you might pre-prepare them on the weekend), add a protein, and [salad dressing](#) (olive oil based!), and you're set!

A few tips: Think color! Add yellow or red bell peppers, shredded purple cabbage, shredded carrots, etc. Add fresh herbs like basil, parsley and cilantro for added flavor and nutrition. You can even add fruit for a little sweetness, apples, oranges, or blueberries are my favorite add-ins.

This recipe, [Rosemary, Chicken, and Avocado Bacon salad](#) is hands-down THE BEST salad I have ever had! Not the quickest, but so worth it! Check out her [Salad Collection](#) to give you some more ideas too.

4. **Sheet pan meals** – LOTS of variation here. The premise of the sheet pan meal is that everything goes in the oven together and cooks at the same time on one pan for easy, hands-off cooking. In order for this to work out you want to make sure the foods you are combining have similar cooking times. Check out this [Sheet Pan Roast Chicken Dinner recipe](#), and the recipe below to get you started. You can also decide if you want leftovers for another day or not by simply adjusting the amount of ingredients you cook (one chicken breast or two, etc.).

Eating real food will take a little extra planning. But feeling good and being healthy is absolutely worth the effort!