



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A.,
Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension
Service

SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Cooking Solo

Objectives:

Participants will be able to plan a meal that includes all five food groups.

Participants will be able to consider options for preparing meals ahead of time.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Finding recipes suitable for singles (and couples) can sometimes be a challenge. This lesson will provide participants with tips and ideas for making solo dining pleasant and healthy.

Lesson:

A growing segment of Americans are people who live and dine by themselves. Some live alone by choice while others may be empty nesters or widowed. A 2020 report from the Pew Research Center estimated that 27 percent of people aged 60 and older in the United States live alone. According to the 2010 US Census, there were 28.3% single person households in South Carolina. Cooking for one requires similar efforts and skills as cooking for a family. Planning, shopping, and storing food properly are factors that may affect decisions.

Planning

Begin by planning to eat well. Rewards of eating well include enjoyment, good health, a trim body, and a reduced risk for diseases. **Ask participants to think about their favorite food. What makes it your favorite? Childhood memories, taste / texture, flavor, travel adventures,other reasons? Allow group to share a few favorites.**

Plan meals with the goal to provide nutrition. Use MyPlate to help select foods based on your age, gender, level of physical activity and more. **(Refer to diagram listed in Suggested Activities below.)** It can help you plan meals based on your personal needs. MyPlate's key messages are: Make half your grains whole grains, vary your veggies, focus on whole fruit, vary your protein routine, and move to low-fat or fat-free dairy. When planning a meal, ask yourself does this meal include all five food groups? If not, think about ways to include the missing group(s) now or in a later meal or snack.

Begin by planning a menu for a week at a time. Having a plan can prevent you from relying on take-out meals and convenience foods which are generally more expensive. If you're short on ideas, look online or in magazines. Most grocery stores have websites or free publications that provide simple recipes you may like.

Weekly flyers will alert you to staples and other foods that may be on sale. Planning also helps cut down on food waste. “Meal Prepping” has become very popular. Some examples are make-ahead meals, batch cooking, individually portioned meals, and ready-to-cook ingredients. Choose a method that works for you in your situation. Here’s an example: A pork roast prepared for Sunday’s dinner can become pulled pork for Monday’s lunch and be added to a pork stir-fry for Tuesday. Using leftovers these ways can save time and money. Freeze any leftovers that you cannot use within 3-4 days.

Shopping

Convert bulk items to “singles” by placing portions in plastic freezer bags or good quality storage containers and freeze to use later. Be sure to date and label each package. Purchase shelf stable items like pasta and other grain foods when they are “buy one get one”. **Ask participants to share 3 ways to use a large bag of produce (apples, cut greens, spinach) before allowing it to spoil.** Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are great choices since they’re frozen immediately after harvesting. Some are also less expensive when frozen. Purchase fresh produce by the piece like a head of broccoli, a single fruit, or a bunch of grapes (freeze some for a healthy, cool snack). Pre-washed vegetables and pre-cut fruits and vegetables can be real time savers if they fit into your budget.

Recipes

Favorite recipes can be reduced in half or fourths by using simple math. Most recipes are written to make 4-6 servings. Search online for single serving recipes. Season adjusted recipes gradually, some will need more or less for the desired flavor. Or invest in a “cooking for one” cookbook.

Equipment

Make it easy on yourself by storing equipment in easy to reach places. Basic equipment to have on hand include:

- Pots and pans
- knives and cutting boards
- wooden spoons
- whisk
- measuring cups and spoons
- mixing bowls
- can opener

Electric pressure cookers, air fryers, waffle makers, blenders, and slow cookers and other small appliances are nice to have.

Staples

Keep these staples on hand:

- Dried beans, peas and lentils
- Flour, baking soda, baking powder, sugar
- Condiments, herb or spice mixes
- Rice and pasta
- Canned tomatoes and sauce
- Frozen or canned fruits and vegetables

Recipe Ideas

Soups, stews, chili – Cook, freeze portions in zipper bags / freezer containers.

Prepare family sized recipe and save half for later.
Add leftover fruits to baked goods like muffins, pancakes and quickbreads.
Use leftover pasta for pasta salads or meat casseroles.
Top a leftover baked potato with chili.
Add chopped or grated vegetables to a prepared rice mix or fried rice.
Use extra bread to make French toast, bread pudding or stuffing.

Time to Dine

Mealtime provides a great deal of enjoyment. Relax and savor the flavors, textures, and colors coming from your creation.
Set a place setting at the table. Use your fancy glasses and dishes.
Add a centerpiece, light some candles, and play some music.
Try a new recipe.
Invite a friend over for a two-person potluck meal.

Lesson Summary:

Having a plan is the key to cooking meals for one. Eating alone does not need to be boring, difficult, or more expensive than you want. Websites, cookbooks, and magazines are available with ideas to simplify the task. Basic kitchen equipment and prior knowledge of ways to use food staples can be the spark needed to create a satisfying meal for one (or two persons). Cooking for one can be a challenge but it can also be very rewarding.

Suggested Activities:

1. Display MyPlate Diagram for discussion. Download from hrca-myplate-flyer-eng.pdf | Powered by Box
2. Select from **bolded** items in lesson to encourage group participation.
3. Pass out “Create a Grocery Game Plan Weekly Calendar and Create a Grocery Game Plan Shopping List. Divide group into teams or pairs. Each should select one of the following foods to use for activity: Ground Meat, Rotisserie Chicken, Dried Beans, or Eggs. Challenge each group to select three different ways the item could be prepared or served.

Suggested Materials:

Copy ahead of time for each participant. Print on front and back:

[Create a Grocery Game Plan Weekly Calendar.pdf \(azureedge.us\)](#)

[Create a Grocery Game Plan Grocery List.pdf \(azureedge.us\)](#)

Pencils/pens

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Sources/References:

UF / IFAS Extension, University of Florida.(2022).[FSHN13-02/FS224: Shopping for Health: A Menu for One \(ufl.edu\)](#)

NDSU Extension.(2024).[Cooking for One or Two \(FN521\) \(ndsu.edu\)](#)

Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging.(2022).Tufts University.

<https://hnrca.tufts.edu/myplate>