

How to Cook for Yourself as an Older Adult

Meal Planning When You Live Independently

Many of us find joy in cooking for others. Whether you recently lost your partner or your household has decreased in size, it can be difficult to transition to cooking for just yourself.

You may be tempted to rely on fast food, takeout, or single-serve frozen meals, but there are significant health benefits to cooking at home. In December 2019, the University of Michigan's [National Poll on Healthy Aging](#) asked a sample of adults ages 50-80 about their cooking and grocery shopping habits. Consider these key takeaways:

- Older adults who cooked dinner at home 6-7 days per week were more likely to describe their diet as excellent or very good (42 percent) compared to those who cooked two or fewer days per week (23 percent).
- 71 percent of adults aged 50-80 said they enjoyed cooking, and enjoyment of cooking was more common among adults who reported being in excellent or very good physical health.

So, simply by learning how to be more comfortable cooking for yourself, you are taking a positive step toward a healthier lifestyle! While it may take some getting used to, we have some tips.

Understand the nutrients you need. Remind yourself of the recommended servings and portion sizes for seniors. According to the [National Institute on Aging](#), adults aged 50 or older should choose from the following every day:

- Vegetables: 2 to 3 cups
- Fruits: 1½ to 2 cups
- Grains: 5 to 8 ounces
- Dairy: 3 cups (fat-free or low-fat)
- Protein: 5 to 6½ ounces
- Oils: 5 to 7 teaspoons

Plan your meals in advance. Search for recipes online, check out cookbooks from your local library, or ask a friend or family member to share their favorite weekday dinners. Write down the recipes that you want to make for the week before you make a grocery list or place a grocery pick-up order. Don't forget to include healthy snack ideas, like raw vegetables and hummus, unsalted nuts, whole grain crackers, or homemade trail mix.

Divide your recipes—or use your freezer. Many recipes are written to serve 4 or more people. Divide the recipe in half before you plan your ingredient list so that you aren't left with more food than you need. Or consider making a batch of soup, casserole, or chili and freezing the leftovers in pre-portioned containers. Then you can pull an easy meal from the freezer on days when you need a quick dinner idea and don't feel like cooking.

Put your safety first. As we get older, moving with ease around the kitchen becomes more difficult. It is so important to prioritize your safety while cooking.

- Keep your kitchen clean and free of clutter to reduce the risk of falling.
- Avoid using out-of-reach cabinets, and store your most-used utensils, kitchen tools, and spices where they can be accessed more easily.
- Never leave food on the stove unattended while it is cooking. According to the [National Fire Protection Association](#), 61 percent of reported house fires involve ranges or cooktops.
- Avoid food-borne illness by checking the temperature of your fridge regularly: Food should be kept at no more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Always store your leftovers in the fridge.

We hope these tips will help you learn to enjoy cooking for yourself. If we can offer additional guidance or support, please do not hesitate to reach out.