Cooking on the Run: Quick-to-Fix (Healthy) Meal Tips

When you have time to cook, make a double or triple batch
For example, simmer enough pasta for two days. Serve it hot on one night with meat sauce, then chilled as a salad with tuna, parsley, and low-fat salad dressing the next. You can also freeze the additional portions of some foods (for example lasagna, pizza, casseroles, etc.) and reheat them at a later date.

Buy prepared foods
For example, grated cheese; pre-cut stir-fry vegetables; healthy frozen dinners; shredded cabbage; skinless chicken strips; mixed salad greens; pre-washed spinach; chopped vegetables. Even thin-sliced, lean deli meat is quick for stir-fried recipes.

Plan ahead
Prepare ingredients ahead of time. Wash and trim a whole head of broccoli or cauliflower into florets. Skewer kebobs with vegetables and meat pieces the night before. Cook lean ground meat ahead for use in tacos, spaghetti or chili.

Stock your pantry and your fridge with quick-to-fix ingredients
For example: pasta, instant rice, frozen and canned vegetables, canned fruits, bread, lean deli meats, salad ingredients, salsa, canned beans, milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Use quick cooking methods
Stir-frying, broiling, grilling and microwaving usually are faster than baking or roasting. Slice meat and poultry in thinner slices for faster cooking.

Prepare meals that pack a variety in just one dish
Try chicken fajitas in a soft taco. Stuff tuna and vegetable salad into a pita pocket. Prepare a ham and spinach quiche. Make a chef's salad, requiring no cooking at all. Or prepare pasta with seafood, Swiss chard, kale or spinach and shredded cheese.

Assemble your own menus
Perhaps deli sandwiches, mini-pizzas on English muffins, burgers with veggies and cheese toppings, or tacos.

Quick prep meals
- **Canned soup** - just add water and warm up in the microwave. Some canned soups don't even require addition of water.
- **Salad** - cut up veggies and lettuce, add low-fat dressing.
- **Meat or veggie sandwich** - combine meat and/or veggies with bread and condiments.
- **Tuna melt** - combine tuna, tomato, cheese with bread; spray skillet with cooking spray and toast in skillet.
- **Salmon pita sandwich** - open a 7 oz. can of salmon and drain, mix with 2 T. light mayonnaise, stuff into pita, add lettuce and tomato.
- **Pizza bagel** - spread spaghetti sauce on a toasted bagel, top with cheese, and microwave.
- **Spaghetti** - cook noodles, drain, return to pot and add sauce.
- **Bean taco** - warm a can of refried beans in microwave, fill taco shell with warm beans, add some diced tomato, shredded lettuce, and cheese.
- **Quesadilla** - place a flour tortilla on a plate, sprinkle with shredded cheese, microwave for 20 seconds, top with salsa, fold tortilla and cut into wedges.
- **Black bean and corn salad** - rinse and drain a 15 oz. can each of black beans and corn, put in bowl with two cups of salsa and mix. Put on tortilla, or dip with chips.
- **Scrambled eggs and toast** – Scramble 1-2 eggs in a skillet coated with cooking spray or microwave for 1-2 minutes. Serve with toast.

Quick, easy, and nutritious breakfasts
- Two whole-wheat toaster waffles topped with 1/2 cup of warm applesauce.
- Two slices of rye toast spread with 1 TBSP each of peanut butter and mashed banana or jam.
- One toasted whole-wheat English muffin with 2 TBSP of cottage cheese and a dab of apple butter.
- One low-fat corn or bran muffin and 6 oz. of nonfat flavored yogurt.
- A bowl of fiber rich, whole grain cereal with skim milk and topped with fruit.
Planning lunches on the run
Brown-bagging it
• Use a variety of foods from the different food groups. Leftovers can be a big help.
• Put some fiber in your lunch by making your sandwich with whole-grain breads and add sliced vegetables, sprouts, or leafy greens, and fresh or dried fruit.
• Don’t forget to pack healthy extras such as raw carrots and celery, and a dessert of fresh fruit or high-fiber, low-fat cookies.

Food safety to go
• Make your sandwiches with frozen slices of bread (to keep the meat and toppings cold).
• A frozen juice box can double as a cold pack and a beverage to save space.

Cooking tips and techniques
Stir-Frying
If you don't have a wok, use a cast-iron or nonstick skillet. Most dishes can be cooked with just a tablespoon of oil if you heat the pan first. Buy pre-cut vegetables to cut down on preparation time. Try stir-frying sliced lean beef and ready-cut broccoli with a dash of soy sauce and ginger root.

Microwaving
Because microwaves cook so quickly, most of the nutrients in the foods you’re cooking don't have time to escape. Be sure to read the cooking directions carefully; it's easy to overcook foods. Use the microwave to "bake" potatoes or winter squash and to reheat leftovers or soup. Fish fillets can be microwaved in minutes - add seasoning and a dash of milk, cover with wax paper, and cook.

Crock Pots
This handy kitchen appliance cooks food slowly at low temperatures. Set it up in the morning and dinner will be ready and waiting for you when you get home. Soups, stews, and pot roasts all make great crock pot meals. Create a variety of flavors by adding different types of canned tomatoes, herbs, and spices.

Baking, Broiling, & Grilling
Bake, broil, or grill foods on a rack to drain fats away during cooking. Try a non-stick electric griller for use throughout all the seasons. Not only is this a healthier way to eat, but it’s delicious as well. Grill vegetables as well as meat - add bell peppers, tomatoes, onions, and mushrooms to kebobs and foil-wrapped packets.

Steaming
Steaming can be done either in a microwave or on the stovetop. Either way, it keeps in nutrients and flavor, without adding fat. Ready-cut vegetable florets and baby carrots can go straight from the bag to the steamer. Steamed brown rice is rich in fiber and taste.

Reference

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu