

Saving Time and Money by Making Food at Home

There times that you want to make more home cooked meals for your family or yourself, but sometimes after a long day at work, it is easier to pick up something at a restaurant for takeout. Sometimes we just need motivation and tips to help better optimize time for making meals at home.

First of all, take comfort in knowing that your household is not the only one that seems to be spending more money on takeout food rather than cooking at home. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015 an average household spent an average of \$3,009 per year on dining out. That number has increased over the past three years with the average spending \$3,154 on food away from home in 2016, and \$3,365 in 2017.

If you want to lessen the amount of money your household spends on takeout meals, one way to do that is by planning and preparing parts of those meals.

You can begin by deciding which recipes you can make in advance that can be stored in your freezer and thawed for later meals. For example, buying ground beef or whole chickens on sale can be a starting point for making several different meals.

Ground beef and chicken are common ingredients in many dishes including pasta sauces, tacos, skillet stroganoff, chili, soups, stews and casseroles. The additional ingredients for these meals can typically come from canned items that can be waiting in your pantry for your to use the day of the week you complete the specific meals.

You can cook several pounds of the ground beef with onions and garlic, drain the fat from the meat, separate the cooked meat mixture based on how much you will need for each meal, and then place the cooked meat into separate freezer bags. Label and date the bags and then place them in your freezer. The same can be done with chicken or several other meats, casseroles or vegetables.

Depending on which food you freeze, you can expect foods kept at zero degrees Fahrenheit to be safe to eat indefinitely, although the quality of the food might deteriorate after 3 to 6 months.

When you are ready to eat one of the frozen meals, you can take it out of the freezer to defrost it in your refrigerator while you are away during the day. When you return home in the evening, be sure to heat the food throughout.

Keeping a list of already made, or half-made meals can make you feel in control as you start.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offers freezer meal workshops, "Cooking with Friends," A workshop is being planned for August. What the newspaper for the dates.