Cooking for one can often seem challenging, time-consuming, or expensive, but it does not need to be. The most important part is to plan ahead each week and to put leftovers to good use. Below are a few tips to help save money in the market and time in the kitchen when preparing meals for one.

**Buying:**
Purchase foods that will stay fresh longer. Look for low sodium canned foods, such as beans and vegetables, or frozen fruits and vegetables. Often times, canned foods can last for years if unopened, without losing nutrients or quality. Boxed items, such as rice and pasta also have a long shelf life. Canned goods and boxed items are frequently on sale so it’s a good time to stock up.

**Cooking:**
When choosing a meal to cook, think of the ingredients you will need. Ask yourself: will there be extra ingredients leftover that may spoil quickly? Choose recipes that require the same ingredient to avoid wasting food. For example, if you have leftover spinach after making a dish, include the remaining amount in a salad, or add it to a pasta dish.

**Freezing:**
One of the best ways to cook for one is to make a full recipe or extra servings of a meal and then freeze them. Freezing will keep meals safe to eat for many months after making.

To freeze a meal:
1. Cook your meal
2. When finished cooking, separate your cooked meal into several containers. This will allow your food to cool quickly and will create individual portions for a later date.
3. Place your packaged servings in the freezer. Be sure to label and date the containers.
4. When ready to eat, reheat your meal in the microwave or toaster oven.
**One Ingredient, Four Ways**

Preparing meals for one can lead to a lot of opened food. Often times, this food ends up in the refrigerator untouched until it is no longer safe to eat. A great way to prevent food from being wasted is to find multiple ways to use the same ingredient. Here are a few examples of how a single ingredient can be used in four different dishes.

### Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes are an excellent source of Vitamin A. Leave the skin on sweet potatoes to get additional potassium and fiber.

1. Bake in the oven
2. Mash to make mashed potatoes as a side dish or Sweet Potato Quesadilla (see our website below for recipe)
3. Dice up and roasted
4. Dice up and used in a soup or stew

### Chickpeas

Chickpeas, when canned, have a long shelf life and can add protein to both hot and cold meals.

1. Blend to make hummus
2. Drain and rinse, then add to a salad
3. Add into a pot of chili
4. Cook and mix in with your favorite whole wheat pasta or brown rice

### Spinach

Spinach is a great source of Vitamins A and K, along with other nutrients.

1. Freshly toss in a salad
2. Add frozen spinach to lasagna
3. Sprinkle on top of a homemade pizza
4. Cook and mix into a whole wheat pasta dish

### Black beans

Black beans (kidney, pinto, cannellini) add protein to recipes at a low cost. Drain and rinse canned beans to remove extra sodium.

1. Mix in a soup or chili
2. Mash into a paste and add into a quesadilla, taco, or wrap
3. Eat cold on a salad
4. Add to a dip or salsa as a snack (check out our Tropical Salsa recipe at web.uri.edu/SnapEd or call our hotline at 1-877-366-3874)