

IEHA Program Lesson Submission

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Topic Title:	Cooking for One or Two
Topic Description: (Information should be researched, educational, approved for use (if you are not the author, seek approval from materials author), and presented in a format that would allow an individual to read, study, and teach to other peers. All copyright issues should be resolved before submission.	Cooking for one or two can come with unique challenges, from oversized recipes and expensive groceries to too many leftovers and food waste. This class provides simple, practical strategies for preparing healthy meals for smaller households. Participants will learn how to build balanced meals, shop smart, manage portions, safely store leftovers, and make the most of ingredients. Whether you live alone, cook with a partner, or are adjusting to a smaller household, this class offers easy ideas to save time, save money, and enjoy cooking again.
Short Goal/Objective Statement for Lesson:	Participants will learn simple strategies for preparing healthy, affordable meals for one or two people while reducing waste and improving confidence in the kitchen.

Cooking for One or Two

Lesson Description: Cooking for one or two can come with unique challenges, from oversized recipes and expensive groceries to too many leftovers and food waste. This class provides simple, practical strategies for preparing healthy meals for smaller households. Participants will learn how to build balanced meals, shop smart, manage portions, safely store leftovers, and make the most of ingredients. Whether you live alone, cook with a partner, or are adjusting to a smaller household, this class offers easy ideas to save time, save money, and enjoy cooking again.

Lesson Objectives: By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to

- Identify parts of a balanced meal using USDA's MyPlate
- Identify the benefits of cooking for one or two
- Use meal planning and "planned-overs" strategies
- Practice safe leftover storage
- Identify smart shopping tips for one or two people
- Describe other ways to reduce food waste in smaller households

Target Audience

- Adults living alone
- Couples
- Empty nesters
- Older adults
- Young adults learning to cook independently

Instructor Supplies

- Whiteboard or flip chart
- Markers
- "Start Simple with MyPlate" Handout

Other Instructor Notes

- Keep tone encouraging and practical
- Emphasize progress over perfection
- Use examples relevant to participant age group
- Encourage freezer use often
- Ask participants to share successful tips

Lesson Plan & Directions

1. Welcome & Icebreaker

Say: Cooking for one or two can often feel challenging. Many recipes are designed to feed families or large groups. Unfortunately, this approach can lead to several unintended consequences in smaller households including food waste, frustration, or unbalanced, highly processed meals. Today we'll learn simple ways to cook healthier meals for smaller households. Before we get into the lesson, let's learn a little more about why each of you are attending today's lesson. What is the hardest part of cooking for one or two?

Do: Write responses on board/flip chart. Draw attention to the fact that many participants may be there for the same reason- they are not alone in their attitudes/feelings about cooking for one or two.

2. Balanced Meals Matter

Teach: Use this time to introduce the USDA's MyPlate, the 5 main food groups, suggested serving sizes, and why balanced meals still matter even in a smaller household. Explain that a "healthy" meal should aim to include at least 4 of the 5 food groups (Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein, and Dairy).

4. Smart Cooking Strategies

Teach: Use this time to emphasize that cooking for one or two does NOT mean giving up favorite meals. Instead, smaller households can adjust their recipes to meet their yield needs. Tips include cutting recipes in half, using smaller pans, checking altered recipes for doneness earlier, adding seasoning gradually, and freezing extra portions in meal preparation containers for ready-to-eat meals.

Discuss: Examples of meals that are easy to reduce (i.e. soup, chili, casseroles, stir fry, sheet pan meals, etc.).

5. Meal Planning & Planned-Overs

Teach: Use this time to introduce the idea that around one-third of household food is wasted. This section of the lesson should help participants understand that meal planning & repurposing leftover foods can help reduce food waste. Introduce the idea of "planned-overs," where individuals can make several unique meals from leftover foods.

Discuss: Examples of leftovers that are easy to repurpose (i.e. chili→ spaghetti & meat sauce, baked potato topping, chili cheese dogs; roasted chicken→ chicken salad, chicken tortilla soup, chicken pot pie; etc.).

6. Strategic Grocery Shopping

Teach: Use this time to emphasize that food costs matter regardless of household size. Encourage participants to shop with intention. Strategic shopping tips include buying shelf-stable products in bulk when useful, freezing bread/meat/fruit, buying produce in varying stages of ripeness, purchasing convenience items when helpful, and shopping smaller trips more often.

7. Food Safety & Leftovers

Teach: Use this time to introduce the idea that a meal isn't complete until leftovers are stored safely. This is especially true for households that intend to incorporate "planned-overs" into their weekly meal plan. Be sure to cover the basics of food safety, including proper refrigerator storage methods, date marking leftovers, freezer storage, proper reheating methods, etc.

8. Motivation & Enjoyment

Teach: Use this time to help reframe how participants think about cooking for one or two.

Do: This section of the lesson should return to the responses provided during the icebreaker session. Ask participants how they might reframe each response in a more positive light. (Ex: "Cooking for one or two takes too much time" → "Cooking for one or two can be a great opportunity to reconnect with myself or a partner. This time can be used to work on communication & teamwork skills or provides an opportunity for me to quietly reflect on my day."). Emphasize the idea that cooking for yourself matters.

Discuss: Encourage participants to share other ideas that help them overcome barriers to cooking for one or two. This can include alternative uses for common cookware, new cooking methods, cooking for one or two cookbooks, potluck dinners, setting/decorating the table, using candles/music, themed nights (Italian Night, Breakfast for Dinner, etc.), practicing mindful eating, etc.

9. Conclusion

Teach: Use this time to review the topics discussed throughout the lesson.

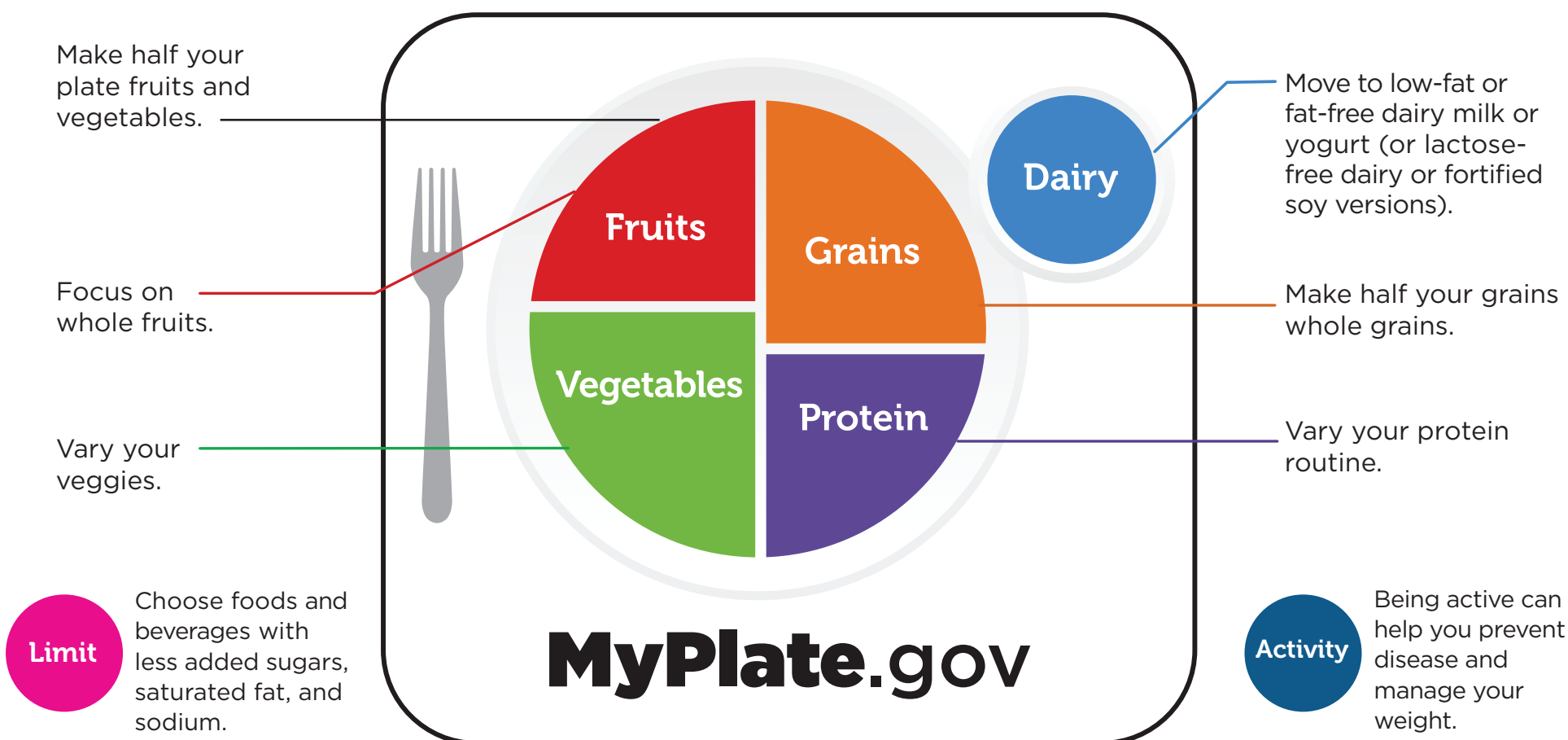
Discuss: Allow time for questions & answers.

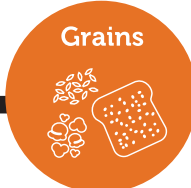
References:

- USDA MyPlate. U.S. Department of Agriculture.
 - www.myplate.gov
- “Single-living households look for more convenience in their food preparation patterns compared to couples and households with children.”
 - <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25963105/>
- “Outsourcing cooking is most prevalent among single-person households; two-or more-person households are most likely to buy unprocessed and natural foods and to spend most time cooking and eating in.”
 - <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25769862/>
- “The average household wastes 31/9% of the food it buys.”
 - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajae.12036>
- USDA Food Safety Basics
 - <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe>

Start *simple* with **MyPlate**

Healthy eating is important at every life stage,
with benefits that add up over time, bite by bite. Small changes matter.



 Fruits	 Vegetables	 Grains	 Protein	 Dairy
Focus on whole fruits like fresh, frozen, canned, or dried. Buy fruits to have them available to add to your meal or eat as a snack. If you buy juice, select 100% fruit juice.	Eat a variety of vegetables and add them to mixed dishes like casseroles, sandwiches, and wraps. Fresh, frozen, and canned count, too. Look for “reduced sodium” or “no-salt-added” on the label.	Choose whole-grain versions of common foods such as bread, pasta, and tortillas. Not sure if it's whole grain? Check the ingredients list for the words “whole” or “whole grain.”	Eat a variety of protein foods such as beans, soy, seafood, lean meats, poultry, and unsalted nuts and seeds. Select seafood twice a week. Choose lean cuts of meat and ground beef that is at least 93% lean.	Choose low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) dairy. Get the same amount of calcium and other nutrients as whole milk, but with less saturated fat and calories. Lactose intolerant? Try lactose-free milk or a fortified soy beverage.

Daily Food Group Targets — Based on a 2,000 Calorie Plan

Visit [MyPlate.gov/MyPlatePlan](https://www.myplate.gov/MyPlatePlan) for a personalized plan.

2 cups	2½ cups	6 ounces	5½ ounces	3 cups
<i>1 cup counts as:</i> 1 small apple 1 large banana 1 cup grapes 1 cup sliced mango ½ cup raisins 1 cup 100% fruit juice	<i>1 cup counts as:</i> 2 cups raw spinach 1 cup cooked collard, kale, or turnip greens 1 small avocado 1 large sweet potato 1 cup cooked beans, peas, or lentils 1 cup cut cauliflower	<i>1 ounce counts as:</i> 1 slice of bread ½ cup cooked oatmeal 1 small tortilla ½ cup cooked brown rice ½ cup cooked couscous ½ cup cooked grits	<i>1 ounce counts as:</i> 1 ounce cooked lean chicken, pork, or beef 1 ounce tuna fish ¼ cup cooked beans, peas, or lentils 1 Tbsp peanut butter 2 Tbsp hummus 1 egg	<i>1 cup counts as:</i> 1 cup dairy milk or yogurt 1 cup lactose-free dairy milk or yogurt 1 cup fortified soy milk or yogurt 1½ ounces hard cheese 1 cup kefir



Limit

Choose foods and beverages with less added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

Limit:

- Added sugars to <50 grams a day.
- Saturated fat to <22 grams a day.
- Sodium to <2,300 milligrams a day.



Activity

Don't forget physical activity!

Being active can help you prevent disease and manage your weight.

Kids ≥ 60 min/day Adults ≥ 150 min/week