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Web Exclusive: Table for One

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Food preparation tips for single cancer patients.

For many single people living with cancer, cooking for one may seem overwhelming, especially with the ease and availability of fast food and pre-prepared meals. But while being trouble-free, many of these options have too many calories and too much fat, while having too few vitamins and nutrients.

In order to endure the physical and mental exhaustion of some cancer treatments, patients need to maintain optimal health and nutrition. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), you have more opportunities for creating healthy food options if you control the preparation of your food. The AICR suggests:

- Select mostly plant foods and limit your red meat intake. On a typical dinner plate, two-thirds of the plate should be a combination of vegetables, fruits, beans, or whole grains. No more than one-third of the plate should be meat or dairy foods.
- Follow a regular recipe and freeze single-size portions. Casseroles and stews freeze well and are easy to reheat. Or simply cut a recipe for four in half.
- Frozen and canned vegetables and fruits can be nourishing, but read the labels for excess sugar and sodium. If you can't find low-sodium versions, rinse the vegetables or fruits with water and strain before adding to your meal.
- Shop with a friend and share the costs of large items. Split a loaf of whole-grain bread. Ask your grocer to cut a melon in half and wrap it for you.
- Add canned beans and fresh or frozen vegetables to a serving of soup to increase the nutrients.
- Set your table, add a centerpiece of flowers, and play soothing music. Enjoy the meal you prepared and relax.

These guidelines may not always apply in the case of marked malnutrition or certain other co-existent disorders. For more suggestions, read AICR's free booklet, "[Cooking Solo: Homemade for Health.](#)"

Patients with weakened immune systems need to take special care in preparing and eating foods. Using a clean knife to cut different foods and cooking eggs until they are not runny are just a couple of recommendations from the [American Cancer Society](#).

Most importantly, don't get frustrated if you are too tired to cook for yourself. There can be good options at fast food restaurants if you choose carefully. Choosing grilled or roasted entrees and replacing french fries with a side salad or cup of fruit are options that many fast food establishments offer these days. Or consider turning home cooking into a fun distraction with the company of friends and family.