



K-State Extension Connection

Be “Wallet Wise” when Dining Out For Immediate Release: January 22, 2015

The mission of K-State Research and Extension Family and Consumer Sciences is to link education with life experiences to help people improve their lives, their families and their communities. Family and Consumer Sciences professionals support essential life skills including Community Development, Healthy Lifestyle Choices, Leadership & Volunteer Development, Relationship Development and Resource Management.

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Many people in the U.S. eat out frequently. In fact, Americans spend about half of their food dollars on foods prepared away from home. Here are ways to lower your family’s costs when dining out:

- **Share a Main Dish.** Restaurant portions are growing in size, along with our waistlines and the bill at the end of our meals. To decrease all of the above, share a main dish or side dish with a friend or family member. This is a great way for kids to eat healthier, too. Kids’ menus are typically made up of foods high in fat, yet low in nutrients. Small children often don’t eat much, so let your children share from your plate to expand their palate and shrink your calorie intake — and your bill.
- **Drinks Anyone?** Order water with meals instead of sodas or specialty drinks. Even a glass of iced tea can easily add an extra dollar per person to your meal cost. Ask for a slice of fresh lemon to add a special touch and a dash of flavor to your water.
- **Do Lunch.** Lunch menus often offer the same items as dinner menus, but in smaller and lower-priced portions. So opting to go out for lunch, or for an early afternoon supper, can save money. However, even during the evening, a smaller portion or half-order may be offered. Opt for the smaller size and you’ll get more than enough food while saving money.
- **Clue in on Coupons.** Some restaurants send out coupons to entice your business. Check your mail, local paper, and even the Internet for special offers. Many restaurants have a weekly kids’ night — where kids under a certain age get a free or reduced-cost meal when they eat with an adult.
- **Plan your Budget.** To reduce your spending on away-from-home dining, reduce how often you and your family eat out. For instance, pick one time every two weeks. Plan where you want to go, cut your coupons and enjoy the meal! If you have a hectic family schedule, look for inexpensive foods when shopping at the grocery store that you can easily use to pack your own “meals-to-go,” and for foods to make quick meals to serve at home.

For additional information, contact the Wildcat Extension District, Crawford County, 620-724-8233, Labette County, 620-784-5337, Montgomery County, 620-331-2690, Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930.

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"Make-Your-Own" Casserole

Makes 6 servings

General Directions:

Select food(s) from each category or use your own favorites. Combine in a buttered 2- to 2 1/2- quart casserole dish. Cover and bake at 350 F for about 50 minutes to 1 hour or microwave using 50% power for about 15 to 30 minutes, rotating or stirring as necessary. Heat until steaming hot (165 F) throughout.

Starch - select ONE:

- 2 cups uncooked pasta (macaroni, penne, spiral, bow tie), COOKED
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain white or brown rice, COOKED
- 4 cups uncooked noodles, COOKED

Protein - select ONE:

- 2 cups cooked ground beef
- 2 cups cooked and diced chicken, turkey, ham, beef, or pork
- 2 cups chopped hard-cooked egg
- 2 (6 to 8-oz.) cans fish or seafood, flaked
- 2 cups cooked or canned dry beans (kidney, etc.)

Vegetable - select ONE:

- 1 (10-oz.) pkg. thawed and drained frozen spinach, broccoli, green beans, green peas
- 1 (16-oz.) can green beans, peas, carrots, corn, drained
- 2 cups sliced fresh zucchini

Sauce - select ONE:

- 2 cups white sauce or 1 can sauce-type soup (mushroom, celery, cheese, tomato, etc.) mixed with milk to make 2 cups
- 1 (16-oz.) can diced tomatoes with juice

Flavor - select ONE or MORE:

- 1/2 cup chopped celery, 1/4 cup chopped onion, 1/4 cup sliced black olives
- 1 - 2 teaspoons mixed dried leaf herbs (basil, thyme, marjoram, tarragon)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Topping- select ONE or MORE:

If desired after heating, place on top:

- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup shredded Swiss, Cheddar, or Monterey Jack cheese
- 1/4 cup buttered bread crumbs
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup canned fried onion rings

Return casserole with topping(s), uncovered, to oven for about 10 minutes or to microwave for about 2 minutes.