

# Organization is the key to 'meals in minutes'

Today's hectic lifestyle makes it very tempting to plan dinner around a bucket of chicken, a bag of burgers or a frozen dinner. Fast foods can dent the budget and may shortchange you nutritionally. "Foods fast" as opposed to "fast foods" may be the perfect solution.



**Lols Thieleke**  
home economist, Cooperative Extension Service

**Meals in Minutes**  
Food and nutrition has gone from fad, to trend to lifestyle. The active lifestyle of busy family members can make it very difficult to gather everyone together for a traditional meal. Most families are into lighter meals, easier preparation of foods and faster cleanup. Time-consuming cooking (other than holidays) has really passed its prime.

"Foods fast" preparation does not mean defrost and cook a frozen TV dinner or open a box. Instead, use your imagination. The key to quick and easy nutritious meals is organization. Start by planning menus. Think about how much time you have for preparation, cooking and cleanup.

To have a well-equipped kitchen you need to consider a generous supply of food staples — the basics,

such as flour, sugar and shortening — so you can put together a meal immediately. This means fewer trips to the grocery store. Streamline shopping by planning ahead for several meals and doing the shopping all at one time.

Look at what convenience appliances you may have in your kitchen. The biggest time-saver is a microwave — the cooking time is cut in half or more. "Meal in a Peel," a baked potato with meat, vegetable and cheese on the top can be a very quick and nutritious meal from the microwave and certainly less expensive than the fast food restaurant.

At home you can control the salt in your cooking that can't be held in check at a fast food restaurant. There is very little cleanup with mi-

crowave cooking because you can cook on the serving dish. Leftovers can be made into your own TV dinners and popped into the microwave for a quick meal with more imagination and more nutrition than the purchased kind.

Sir frying has been gaining in popularity. Use a wok or a skillet. Chicken, beef, pork or other meats are sliced thin for quicker cooking. The meat should be fully cooked, but all the vegetables are better if still crunchy. Lemon juice or herbs sprinkled on these will eliminate salt and bring out the good flavor of the vegetables.

Crock pots are great for long, slow cooking. Since this is the time of year for hearty soups and stews, let

the crock pot have the meal ready in minutes.

Let the food cook all day and when you arrive home the soup/stew is ready. Serve bread and a piece of fruit and you have a nutritious meal in minutes.

Since a crock pot makes a larger batch, freeze some for another time. Tough meats cooked in liquid in a slow cooking method can make them very tender. Using leftovers in soups/stews makes preparation time even less.

Food processors and blenders make chopping, peeling, slicing, shredding and pureeing easier and quicker. Do extra for the next time so you are preparing two or more meals at one time. One mess, one cleanup.

Pressure cookers can speed up cooking time. These are especially helpful for less tender cuts of meat and large vegetable pieces that you need in a hurry. Be careful with the pressure cooker, follow the manufacturer's directions for use.

Broiling and stove top cooking are usually faster than one item oven cooking. Do several things at the

same time. If the oven is set on 400, in 30 minutes you can have meat pie, biscuit roll-ups, pasties, baked salmon, escalloped potatoes, cobbler, baked apples and muffins.

If the oven is set on 375, in one hour you can have meatloaf, casseroles, spanish rice, stuffed peppers, baked potatoes, upside-down cake and gingerbread.

If the oven is on, make two roasts at the same time, use one and freeze the other. Remember when you double a recipe you only clean the kitchen once!

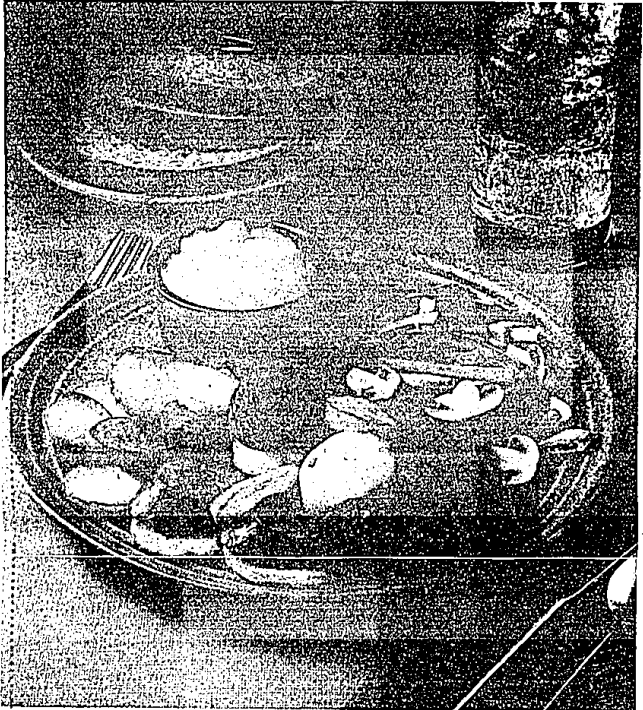
A freezer can really be helpful for a quick meal by offering convenience and flexibility to meal planning. Freeze foods in containers you can use in the microwave or oven. You do not have to wait to thaw them out — just pop in the oven. Other helpful suggestions are: shorten the cooking time by cutting ingredients in small pieces. So what if the spaghetti isn't 12 inches long. Use boiling water or very hot water in recipes that call for water. A flat baking dish cooks faster than a regular casserole dish. Cake pans are great for casseroles. Bake on the

griddles and save time. Just before baking, press out meats or fruit gently into bread, cake and cookie batter. No need for icings or glazes. Foods heat faster if they start out at room temperature. This does not mean foods sit out on the counter all day. Instead, when you arrive home, take the food out of the refrigerator while you remove your coat, look at the mail or whatever.

Make individual portions, as opposed to one large (for example, individual meat loaves instead of one large). Look for recipes that are one dish meals or casseroles. Always have some "no cook" food on hand, such as canned fish, cheese and fruit. A meal can be made hot or cold, fast or slow with these.

You may still be tempted, to turn into the first fast food place you pass on the way home. Whether it be fast foods or foods fast, remember the key is moderation and variety for good eating and good health.

Lols Thieleke is a home economist with the Oakland County Cooperative Extension Service. Watch for her next column, "Nutrition on a Shoestring."



Creole Sausage Pie and Southern Fries and Sausage (shown above) make hot, zesty meals great for those blustery winter days.

## Creole sausage brightens those dreary winter days

When blustery weather brings cabin fever and puts a damper on things, spice up mealtime with zesty sausages that lend a Latin kick.

- CREOLE SAUSAGE PIE**  
1 pkg. (16 oz.) hot roll mix  
1 1/4 cups hot water  
2 tsp. vegetable oil  
1 1/4 cups chopped onions  
1 large green pepper, cut into strips  
1 fresh or canned jalapeno pepper, seeds and veins discarded, chopped  
2 tsp. vegetable oil  
1 can (4 oz.) mushroom stems and pieces, drained  
1/2 tsp. dried crushed red pepper  
1 can (15 oz.) pizza sauce  
1 pkg. (12 oz.) Beef Hot Links Sausage, cut into 3/4-inch slices

Make hot roll mix according to package directions for pizza dough,

using hot water and 2 tsp. oil. With greased hands, pat dough into greased jelly-roll pan, 15 x 10 inches, forming rim around edge. Generously pierce bottom of dough with fork; let stand 15 minutes.

Saute onions, green pepper and jalapeno pepper in 2 tsp. oil in large skillet until onions are tender. Stir in mushroom and crushed red pepper. Spread sauce evenly over dough, top with onion mixture and sausage slices. Bake at 425 degrees until edges of dough are deep golden brown, 15-25 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes; cut into squares to serve. Makes 4-6 servings.

**SOUTHERN FRIES AND SAUSAGE**  
4 large all-purpose potatoes, sliced into 1/4-inch rounds  
2 tsp. margarine  
1 tsp. vegetable oil

Seasoned salt  
Pepper  
2 pkg. (12 oz. each) Beef Hot Links Sausage, cut into 3/4-inch pieces

Fry potatoes in hot margarine and oil in large skillet, frying one layer at a time until golden on both sides. Drain on paper toweling; sprinkle very lightly with seasoned salt and pepper.

While potatoes are frying, cook sausages in large skillet over medium heat until thoroughly heated and browned. Combine potatoes and sausages in serving bowl. Serve with sauteed or steamed green peppers and mushrooms and chunky applesauce if desired. Makes 6 servings.

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**CLIP A SAVE**

## Baked Alaska is dramatic dessert

Baked Alaska is a dramatic dessert that is amazingly easy to make.

### PINEAPPLE BAKED ALASKA

- 1 large fresh pineapple
- 1 quart favorite sherbet, semi-softened
- 4 egg whites, room temperature
- 1/4 cup cream of tartar
- 1/4 cup sugar

Cut pineapple in half lengthwise through crown, leaving shells intact. Remove fruit from shells, turn shells upside down to drain. Cut fruit in

quarters, core and cut into bite-size chunks. Spread sherbet in pineapple shells. Cover, place in freezer 4 hours or overnight until sherbet is frozen. Preheat oven to 450°F. Beat egg whites and cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar, beating until glossy and stiff peaks form. Top sherbet-filled pineapple shells with pineapple chunks. Spread meringue over pineapple, sealing edges well. Make peaks in meringue with back of spoon. Cover crowns with foil. Bake 4-5 minutes until meringue is lightly browned. Remove foil. Serve at once. Makes 6 servings.

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