

## Plan Meals Before Shopping During a Quarantine

*Food provides opportunities for fun, reassurance at home*

In normal times, most consumers don't think twice about a quick trip to the grocery store to pick up a few items.

But these are not normal times. With the threat of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, hanging over most of the country, "social distancing" has become a commonly understood term, one that makes planning trips to the grocery more important.

"In our home, the new object of the game is to see if we can put off a trip to the store," said Sandy Procter, a nutrition specialist with K-State Research and Extension. "We are challenging ourselves to not make the quick, short trip, if that's still possible, and to wait until we have a more complete list. It's our way of trying to minimize those trips and the (social) connections that we are supposed to avoid right now."

Procter said "it makes more sense than ever to have a plan" when shopping for a quarantine or during a time when we should avoid being around others. "And then we need to follow that plan and utilize what we have on hand before we make what used to be a second-natured, quick trip to the grocery store," she said. "We need to be a little more intentional in how we shop; do some work ahead of time to plan meals, then use what we have on hand so that we can keep our distance until things get better."

Planning a week's worth of meals isn't always easy for some. "I have friends who write day-to-day menus in their normal life, and that works well for them," Procter said.

"But for others – and especially those of us who may have multiple people in our homes for meals that we don't normally serve – it's going to take some adapting on the fly."

Procter offered a few tips for planning meals:

- **Buy items in bulk.** Instead of buying grab-and-go breakfast bars, buy a box of bulk oatmeal instead. You can provide a lot of servings at once, and it's often less expensive.
- **Start with the basics,** such as sugar, flour or other items that help you make food from scratch. "Quick meals are maybe not as important right now as much as having enough variety on hand to make flexibility a key part of menu planning," Procter said.
- **Buy shelf-stable foods.** Fresh produce is great, but to avoid multiple trips to the store during the week, be sure to buy canned goods too. "Foods that are in cans or frozen are packed at their peak of nutritional value, so we know that those are healthy foods," Procter said. "Use the fresh items first, then incorporate those that will keep longer."
- **Include kids in meal planning.** "They will probably have some good ideas, and there are lessons that can be shared, too," Procter said. It's one of those times that we will think back on and you'll appreciate having the time to hang out with the kids and teaching them to cook."

"All of this may be a little hard to adjust to," Procter said, "and you're probably going to have some cabin fever setting in soon, if it hasn't already. But think of family activities that are going to be welcome and reassuring, like cooking or baking or cleaning up together after you've had a food experiment or activity."

Planning meals will also help consumers use common sense and avoid the temptation to hoard goods: "Don't purposely clear out a shelf in the grocery store of something you need," she said. "If there are six on the shelf, and you need just one or two, don't take all six. Leave some there for the next guy." "Take what you need, use it, plan well, incorporate everything you have into those menus and be smart about using all of our resources now."

For more information, visit the K-State Research and Extension [food nutrition and safety webpage](#).

K-State Research and Extension has compiled numerous publications and other information to help people take care of themselves and others during times of crisis. See the [complete list of resources online](#).

Local K-State Research and Extension agents are still on the job during this time of closures and confinement. They, too, are practicing social distancing. Email is the best way to reach them, but call forwarding and voicemail allow for closed local offices to be reached by phone as well (some responses could be delayed). To find out how to reach your local agents, visit the K-State Research and Extension county and district directory.

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