

Cooking When You Have Low Energy

When you are tired (have low energy), it may be hard to:

- Think of meal ideas
- Make a grocery list
- Shop for groceries
- Cook meals
- Clean-up after cooking

These activities use:

- Physical energy which can tire your body
- Mental energy which can tire your mind



Try the tips to help you save energy, time, and stress when planning and making meals.

Plan ahead

Make the most of your energy when you have it. Pace yourself—do one task at a time. Include family or delegate tasks if able.

- Plan what meals you will have for the week ahead of time.
- Keep a list of your favorite recipes or meals.
- Try grouping meals with similar ingredients, like one-pot meals, chicken, or vegetarian. This can help use leftovers and limit mental energy used to plan different meals.
- Have a few quick meals to make when you have low energy. These meals include foods or ingredients you often have at home.
- Consider recipes that make large amounts. This allows you to have planned leftovers.
- Use a slow cooker, make a one-pot meal, or plan to eat leftovers as a meal on days when you are busy or more tired.
- Choose ingredients in recipes that require less time and energy to prepare. Try frozen chopped onion or shredded cheese.



Ask a friend or family member to help with shopping, cooking, or clean-up. This can be a way to spend time with a partner, friend, or child.

Grocery shopping

These tips may help save your energy at the grocery store.

Make a list

- Before you go to the store, make a list of what you need. Sort your list by sections of the grocery store, like produce or freezer. Or organize it by your usual path through the aisles.
- Keep ingredients or foods that you use often in stock for meals that can be made quickly.
- Include pre-cooked meals, ready-to-eat foods, pre-chopped foods, frozen foods, shredded cheese, or canned meat, fish, or beans.

Go to smaller stores or stores you are familiar with

- Smaller stores require less walking.
- Familiar stores may make it easier to find items on your list.

Shop when the store is less busy

- Less busy times tend to be calmer and have fewer crowds. This may save your energy and make it easier to shop.

Use a cart or shopping trolley

- Try one even for small shopping trips.

Take breaks

- Stores may have chairs or benches where you can rest while shopping. These may be near pharmacies or at the front of stores.

Shop online if available

- Try shopping for your full list or just the heavier or bulkier items.
- Choose to pick up your groceries or have them delivered (sometimes for a fee).
- Ask family or friends to pick up items for you when they go shopping.

Cooking

Try these tips to save energy when making meals.

Prepare meals or recipes in stages

- Do some steps ahead of time. Spread out the tasks so you spend less time and energy when it is time to cook.
 - Chop vegetables ahead of time when you have more energy. Store them in the fridge until you are ready to cook.
 - Use pre-chopped vegetables (fresh, canned, or frozen).
- Cook meat and grains (like rice or barley) ahead of time. Keep in the fridge or freeze in single-serve portions.

Set up your kitchen

- Bring the shelf-stable ingredients or equipment to the main spot you will be cooking. This limits walking back and forth.
 - Use a kitchen cart for moving ingredients or equipment (see page 4).
- Arrange cupboards to place objects you use most often in easy-to-reach places.
- Use slide-out trays inside cupboards to make items easier to reach.
- Cook with lightweight pots and pans. Keep your favorite pot or pan on the stove for easy use.
- Use kitchen appliances, like food processors, air fryers, or slow cookers.

Use kitchen tools

- Use kitchen utensils that have large handles and grips that are easier for you to hold.

Sit when making food

- Sit on a stool or at a table when chopping, peeling, mixing, and cooking.
- Keep bowls beside you to put compost or garbage into.

Wear an apron

- Try one with pockets to help carry items.

Cleaning up

Try some of these tips to make cleaning up easier and take less energy.

- Consider taking a break between cooking, eating, and cleaning up.
- Line cooking sheets or pans for the oven with aluminum foil, parchment paper, or reusable silicone baking sheets.
- Freeze leftovers. Label the container with the date of when they were made.
 - Food can be kept in the freezer for up to 3 months.
 - To learn more about food safety, visit Canada.ca/FoodSafety.
- Soak pots and pans in soapy water to soften hard and stuck-on food.
- Use a dishwasher, if you have one.
- Use a drying rack and let items air dry.
- Try easy-to-open containers to store leftovers.

Plan a cooking break

When your energy is low, you may not feel like making your meals.

- Ready-to-eat fresh or frozen meals may be available in grocery stores, delis, and some farmers' markets. These include:
 - bagged salad or frozen vegetables
 - pre-cooked rotisserie chicken
 - frozen entrees like lasagna or chicken korma
- Meal order companies, like Meals on Wheels® or Heart to Home®, may be available in your community.
- Check with your community or seniors' centres to see if they have cooking programs or meal prep sessions you can join.

Save energy when following a recipe

The recipe below shows examples of how you can save energy and time while making a one-pot meal.

Garlic can be bought already minced.

Look for it in the spices or produce area of the grocery store.

Chop **vegetables** ahead of time or buy pre-cut (fresh, canned, or frozen). Look for chopped onions in the freezer section.

Sit on a stool while chopping as this can take time.

Measure **spices** before cooking.

Sweet Potato & Chicken Curry

Ingredients

- Canola oil.....2 tsp (10 mL)
- Garlic, minced.....3 cloves
- Onion, diced.....½ medium
- Sweet potato, cubed.....2 cups (500 mL)
- Celery stalks, chopped2 medium
- Bell peppers, sliced or diced1 medium
- Green beans, frozen.....2 cups (500 mL)
- Frozen chicken breast, whole ..1 lb (450 g)
- Chicken broth²/₃ cups (150 mL)
- Curry powder.....1 Tbsp (15 mL)
- Cumin.....1 tsp (5 mL)
- Ground turmeric.....1 tsp (5 mL)
- Salt½ tsp (2.5 mL)
- Coconut milk.....1 can (400 mL)

Buy frozen **chicken** breast or thighs in bulk. Or substitute with pre-shredded rotisserie chicken.

Use an electric can opener (if you have one) or buy a brand of **coconut milk** with an easy-pull tab.

Find recipes

- [ahs.ca/Recipes](https://www.ahs.ca/Recipes)
- [High-calorie and high-protein recipes](https://www.myhealth.alberta.ca) on [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://www.myhealth.alberta.ca) for recipes and to watch videos of dietitians making the recipes.
- [UnlockFood.ca](https://www.unlockfood.ca) > Browse by Topic > Cooking and Food > Quick and Easy Meals



New to cooking?

- Visit [Nutrition Education](https://www.nutritioneducation.ca) ([ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts)) and search “How to Use a Recipe” or “Quick and Easy Meals”

Kitchen tools

Kitchen equipment, appliances, and tools may make cooking easier for you. The items below can be bought in home goods stores or online. You may have some already in your kitchen.

 <p>5-in-1 bottle opener</p>	 <p>Dycem® non-slip material</p>	 <p>Electric can opener</p>
 <p>Food processor</p>	 <p>Jar opener</p>	 <p>Kitchen cart with wheels</p>
 <p>Kitchen utensils with large handles or foam grip tubing</p>	 <p>Non-slip cutting boards and mixing bowls</p>	 <p>Vegetable chopper, dicer, or slicer</p>

More information



Check out the Program Guide at ahs.ca/SHCWellness for Wellness Kitchen classes.

More support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.