

Food Preparation Guidelines

Many EFNEP participants do not have the skills to cook for themselves and their families; therefore, they eat out a lot or buy a lot of prepackaged, processed foods. Choosing to eat out and buy prepackaged, processed foods regularly can be hard on a family's food budget and make it difficult to choose healthy foods. By teaching participants basic cooking skills, we can help participants gain confidence in cooking and help save them money. In EFNEP, we teach participants how to choose and cook healthy, easy, low cost meals. The following guidelines apply to all food activities in the EFNEP program.

Food Tastings, Demonstrations, and Preparations

- **Food tastings** – recipe is prepared before class and given to the participants to taste.
 - The only times food tastings are an appropriate choice, is either during recruitment events or during Lesson 2: Plan, Shop, Save where participants compare the taste and price of national brand foods and store brand foods.
- **Food demonstrations** – educator prepares the recipe as participants watch.
 - The only time food demonstrations are an appropriate choice is during recruitment events.
- **Food preparations** – participants prepare the recipe together while the educator facilitates. Participants are actively involved the recipe preparation.
 - Food preparations are always the best choice because this is when participants actually learn new skills.

Always choose a **food preparation** instead of a food tasting or a food demonstration.

- Most ingredients for all recipes in the *Eating Smart • Being Active* curriculum can and should be fully prepared during class with a few exceptions. The only food items that **may** be prepared ahead of class include:
 - **Pasta**
 - Cook pasta according to the package, drain and put in a sealable bag. Write the date the pasta was cooked on the sealable bag.
 - Cooked pasta can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 to 5 days. Throw any leftover pasta in the trash after 5 days. **DO NOT** freeze cooked pasta.
 - *Note: When making the Skillet Mac & Cheese and the Chili Tomato Beefy Macaroni recipes, do not cook the pasta ahead of time. The pasta in these recipes needs to be hot for the ingredients to mix together. Make this pasta in the skillet during class.*
 - Recipes that include pasta that can be cooked ahead of time include:
 - Skillet Lasagna
 - Winter Italian Vegetables
 - Pasta Salad
 - Salmon Mac & Cheese
 - **Rice**
 - Cook rice according to the package and put in a sealable bag. Write the date the rice was cooked on the sealable bag.
 - Cooked rice can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 to 5 days. Cooked rice can be stored in the freezer for up to 6 months.*

- Cook rice ahead of time for all recipes in the lessons.
- **Chicken**
 - Cook chicken thoroughly using a food thermometer. Store in a sealable bag or a container with a lid. Write the date the chicken was cooked on the sealable bag or container.
 - Cooked chicken can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 to 5 days.
 - Chicken may **ONLY** be cooked ahead of time when using it in the Fried Rice recipe. For any other recipes that contain chicken, cook the chicken from raw during the lesson.
- **Cranberry Pecan Granola**
 - Cook the granola according to the recipe. Store in a sealed container at room temperature for up to 5 days.
 - Granola should only be used in class when making the Breakfast Parfaits.
- **Baked Tortilla Chips**
 - Cook Baked Tortilla Chips according to the recipe.
 - Baked Tortilla Chips may be made ahead of time
 - Recipes that require Baked Tortilla Chips include:
 - Mango Salsa
 - Cowboy Caviar
 - Zesty Bean Dip
- **Recipes that require an oven**
 - Recipes that require an oven and cannot be made in the skillet have been designated as “cookbook only” recipes. These recipes are listed in the cookbook but are not recipes listed in lesson plans. Do not use cookbook only recipes during lessons.

**When freezing food items, be sure to use storage containers that are meant to be used in the freezer; otherwise, the food could get freezer burn or absorb smells and flavors of other foods that are stored in the freezer.*

Food Safety Before, During and After Class

In EFNEP, one of the major content areas we focus on is food safety – food safety refers to keeping food free from dangerous levels of bacteria and other germs that can make us sick. By practicing proper food safety when preparing for class, conducting food activities and when cleaning up leftovers, food is kept safe to eat for participants and they see us practicing proper food safety techniques. Practice these food safety techniques every time you buy, store and prepare food:

- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
 - Transport food in a cooler with blue ice.
- Pull long hair back into a braid or ponytail.
- Educator and all participants should always wash their hands before doing any food activity.
 - If there is no running water available, use hand sanitizer.
- Cover hand/finger wounds with a disposable glove (see the **Using Disposable Gloves** protocol).
- Use a clean vinyl tablecloth on the food preparation area.
- Don't cross contaminate foods – keep raw meat separate from ready to eat foods.

- Don't leave the food sitting out for more than 2 hours.

General Food Safety Messages

Clean

- Always wash hands in hot, soapy water before and after preparing and eating food.
- Always wash counters, tables, utensils, dishes, cutting boards, etc. with hot soapy water before and after preparing/eating food.
- Always wash hands and other surfaces that come in contact with raw meat before touching anything else with hands/surfaces.

Separate

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from ready-to-eat foods in the grocery cart, refrigerator, and during preparation.
- Store raw meat, poultry, and seafood covered on a plate on the refrigerator's bottom shelf so juices don't drip onto other foods.
- Do not put any ready to eat foods on a surface that previously had raw meat until after that surface has been cleaned with hot, soapy water.
- Never place cooked food on a plate which previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Cook

- Cook foods to safe internal temperatures.
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure the doneness of meat, egg dishes and other foods that need to be cooked before eaten.
- Keep hot foods hot until ready to be refrigerated.

Chill

- Put perishable foods away first when returning from the grocery store.
- When doing several errands, make the grocery store the last stop before returning home or to the office where food will be put away.
- Keep cold foods cold until ready to be cooked or eaten.
- Do not leave perishable foods out for longer than 2 hours.
- Do not thaw foods on the counter; thaw in the microwave or in the refrigerator.

Additional Food Preparation Considerations

- Remember to use the **Before Beginning Food Activities in Class** protocol to facilitate food activities during classes.
- Practice and teach participants knife safety. See **Knife Safety Guidelines** for additional information.

- Consult the **EFNEP Purchasing Guidelines** for additional information about what foods and food tasting supplies are allowable.
- If you or a participant has an open hand wound, review the **Using Disposable Gloves** protocol.