

# Words on Wellness

YOUR EXTENSION CONNECTION TO NUTRITION AND FITNESS

## Slow Cooking, Safe Cooking



January is National Slow Cooker Month, a perfect time to try out some new recipes or dig out your favorites. But first, here are some safety tips when using your slow cooker:

- Thaw first. Always thaw meat or poultry, following safe thawing practices, before placing in a slow cooker.
- Preheat cooker. If possible, preheat the cooker and add hot liquids.
- Put vegetables on the bottom or sides. Vegetables cook the slowest, so place them near the heat.
- Don't cook on warm. Do not use the warm setting to cook food. This setting keeps food warm; it does not cook it.
- Keep the lid on. Each time you raise the lid, the temperature drops 10–15 degrees and the cooking process slows by 30 minutes.
- Check the temperature. Before taking a bite, use a food thermometer. Visit [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) for a chart on safe minimum internal cooking temperatures.
- Cool properly. Do not leave cooked food in the crock to cool. Place leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate.
- Do not reheat food or leftovers in a slow cooker. Instead, reheat on stove top or microwave (165°F or above) and transfer to slow cooker to keep warm (140°F or above).

Source: [USDA Slow Cookers and Food Safety](https://www.fsis.usda.gov), [fsis.usda.gov](https://www.fsis.usda.gov).

## Slow Cooker Mexican Chicken Soup

Serving Size: 1 1/2 cup | Serves: 8

### Ingredients:

- 2 cans (15 oz each) diced tomatoes
- 3/4 cup dried black beans, rinsed
- 1 bag (16 ounces) frozen corn, thawed
- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 pound skinless boneless chicken breast, thawed
- Optional—Baked tortilla chips, chili flakes, chopped cilantro, jalapenos, lime, chopped avocado, light sour cream, salsa, or shredded cheese

### Directions:

1. Add all ingredients to the slow cooker. Cook for 4–6 hours on high heat or 8–10 hours on low.
2. Remove chicken right before serving. Shred using two forks. Stir shredded chicken into soup.
3. Serve with choice of optional ingredients.

**TIPS:** Use Mexican diced tomatoes to add spice.

### Nutrition information per serving:

210 calories, 3g total fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 35mg cholesterol, 270mg sodium, 28g total carbohydrate, 6g fiber, 4g sugar, 19g protein

This recipe is courtesy of ISU Extension and Outreach's Spend Smart. Eat Smart. website. For more information, recipes, and videos, visit [spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu](https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu)



[www.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.extension.iastate.edu)

## Time to Spill the Beans

If you have dry or canned beans in your pantry, you have the start to an easy, budget-friendly meal. Beans are high in iron, zinc, potassium, folate, and fiber—nutrients missing in the diet of many Americans. Beans are readily available and an inexpensive source of protein. Adults should eat at least 1 1/2 cups of beans per week. They come in many sizes and varieties, including kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), black-eyed peas, split peas, and lentils. There is a type of bean to please everyone!

One of the easiest ways to prepare dried beans is in the slow cooker. Simply rinse beans and remove any small stones, dirt, or withered beans. Then combine 1 pound of dried beans (2 cups) with 8 cups of water in the slow cooker. Lastly, cook on low for 6–8 hours (or overnight), until beans are soft.

Sources:

[USDA, Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015–2020, health.gov](https://www.health.gov)

[Spend Smart. Eat Smart., spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu](http://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu)

## Geocaching—A treasure hunt around the corner



Geocaching is a modern-day treasure hunt. It takes people to places they otherwise may have never gone. It's a low-cost way for the whole family to stay active. You can enjoy outdoor adventures year-round. In fact, winter can be the best time to geocache—no bugs and fewer people!

To get started, set up a free account at Geocaching ([geocaching.com/play](http://geocaching.com/play)). Download the app to your smartphone or purchase a GPS unit. In the app, you will see a map of all the caches. You can either choose to search for caches near you or browse for other locations you want to explore.

What you will find may be a very small pill container or a larger plastic container. Some will be harder to find than others, but they are never buried. Inside will be a log to sign. There might also be “swag” like geodes, stickers, patches, pins, marbles, keychains, lanyards, and geocoins. Visit [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com) for success tips and discover what is hiding near you!