

# To Your Health

February 2010

## Declutter, Save Money on Groceries

*The following article comes from the ISU Extension "Spend Smart. Eat Smart" website. Peggy Martin, ISU Extension specialist, writes in a January 11 post:*

"I am still in my organizing/cleaning frame of mind. I don't mind when I have multiples of things I use all the time - like canned tomatoes, black beans, yogurt, margarine, fresh fruits and vegetables, etc., but when the pantry is full of partially used items or things I can't remember how long I have had or why I bought them, it's time to make a list and clean them out.

"First, I make a list of everything I have too many of, partial packages, or specialty items that I have to make an effort to use. Then I make up menus using those items, crossing them off as I go. Sometimes I have to buy a few items to round out a meal or

complete a recipe, so I also start a grocery list.

"Last week it was my turn to host dinner club. I decided on a Tex-Mex theme to take advantage of what was in my cupboard. I was able to present a great meal while only buying 1 pound ground beef, 3 avocados, and a bag of carrots.

"For the future, I am trying to write the month and year on items when I add them to my pantry. I remember my mom using a marker to write dates on the tops of cans and boxes. It was easy to see how long items had been on the shelf."

Great idea! We all have items hiding in the cupboards and pantry that need to be used, are out of date, or need to be discarded. Cleaning and organizing in the kitchen sounds like an activity for a snow day.

And I like Peggy's suggestion of making menus to use things up. Soup would be good to have on the menu - to use up foods on hand, and as a quick main dish for lunch or dinner.

### **Cheesy Broccoli Soup** (makes 4 servings - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup each)

Ingredients: 1/4 cup water

2-2 1/2 cups frozen chopped broccoli\*

3 tablespoons flour

1/4 teaspoon onion or garlic powder

1/8 teaspoon black pepper

2 tablespoons margarine

2 cups nonfat milk

4 slices (3 ounces) American cheese

Instructions:

•Heat water to boiling in 3-quart saucepan. Add broccoli. Cover and cook 1 to 2 minutes.

•Pour broccoli onto a dinner plate or cutting board (water will have cooked away); set aside.

•In small bowl, combine flour, onion or garlic powder, and pepper.

•Add margarine to saucepan and melt over medium heat. Add flour mixture and stir with whisk or fork until well mixed.

(continued on page 2)

• Gradually stir in milk, stirring constantly with whisk to keep sauce smooth. Cook over medium heat, stirring or whisking a few times, until thick and bubbly, about 4 to 5 minutes. Meanwhile, cut broccoli into pieces.

• Add broccoli to sauce and turn heat to low. Add cheese slices. Cook and stir about 2 minutes or until cheese melts. Serve immediately.

\*Idea: Use frozen mixed vegetables, frozen peas, or chopped cooked potatoes instead of broccoli.

Nutrition information per serving: 210 calories, 11g fat, 4g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 400mg sodium, 19g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 10g sugar, 12g protein, 30% vitamin A, 80% vitamin C, 30% calcium, 6% iron.

Source:

[www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/prepare/broccoli\\_soup.htm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/prepare/broccoli_soup.htm)

## Try the Online Food Calculator

All families buy food, but they may not know the appropriate amount to spend for a family their size, or how much they actually spend each month on food and eating out. An online calculator - found on the **Spend Smart. Eat Smart**. Web site creates a custom estimate based on age, gender, and number of meals consumed within the home.

The online calculator gives families a weekly and monthly amount for food. Families can compare this amount to what they usually spend to see if they are close. The Web site provides hundreds of suggestions to cut costs for families that are spending over the **SpendSmart** estimate. If families are spending less than advised and need assistance, links to community resources are available online.

Go to: [www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings)  
Find the online calculator under "Figure your food dollar."

## Slow Cookers and Food Safety

*Opening the door on a cold evening and being greeted by the inviting smells of beef stew or roast is a diner's dream come true.*

Any time of year, a slow cooker can make life a little more convenient.

A slow cooker is **safe**. It cooks foods slowly at a low temperature - usually between 170°F and 280°F. Low heat helps less expensive, leaner cuts of meat become tender and shrink less. The direct heat from the pot, lengthy cooking and steam created within the tightly-covered container combine to destroy bacterial and make the appliance a safe process for cooking foods.

**Begin with** a clean cooker, clean utensils, clean work area, clean hands. Keep perishable foods refrigerated until preparation time. If you cut up meat and vegetables in advance, store them separately in the refrigerator.

**Thaw** meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker.

**Use the right amount of food.** Fill cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full. Vegetables cook slower than meat and poultry in a slow cooker. Put them in first. Then add meat and desired amount of liquid (broth, water, barbecue sauce). Keep the lid in place, removing only to stir the food or check for doneness.

Most cookers have two or more **settings**. Foods take different times to cook depending on the setting used. For all-day cooking or for less-tender cuts, you may want to use the low setting.

To learn more, go to [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) Fact sheets are available on a variety of topics.

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