

The Big Wide World

Thurrock Council Aftercare Team's

Guide to independence

Food budgeting and cooking

In this book you can find advice on how to get food that's affordable, tasty and nutritious.

We've also given you some great cooking tips!

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Food shopping

Use the sheet below to complete an average weekly menu for what you would usually eat at home then complete a shopping list of what you would need to buy for your menu.

If you visit supermarkets at certain times, you can often get a reduced prices on food that's getting near its use-by or sell-by dates. Supermarkets discount their produce at different times, so to take advantage of this you will have to be flexible with your menu planning and get food that is due to expire but that you'll be able to eat in time.

Weekly food menu

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Breakfast							
Lunch							
Dinner							

Weekly shopping list

Items

Shopping and cooking on a budget

Once you're in the shops and you know how much you've got to spend, use a calculator – maybe one on your mobile phone – to add up everything as you go round.

While you're looking round the supermarket, keep your eyes open for special offers such as 'buy one get one free'.

Don't waste food

All food decays over time and should be eaten before it goes off, when it is still safe to eat. The dates printed on food tell you:

- **Display Date (DD)** – the latest date the supermarket would leave the food on sale
- **Best Before (BB)** – food is best to eat before this date, but is still safe to eat after
- **Use By (UB)** – food will go off and shouldn't be eaten after this date

The way that food is packaged effects how long it can last.

Tinned foods would last longer than any other type of pre-packaged food due to the way that it is made and stored. If you have a dented or damaged can, however, it can affect the contents and may not always be safe to eat.

Cooking

Even for those of you who don't like cooking, making a basic meal doesn't have to be a nightmare.

We've provided a few simple recipes below that are cheap and easy to follow. All the ingredients you need can be bought at the supermarket. Each recipe will serve 2 people.

Recipes

Omelette

Ingredients:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 eggs• 2 tablespoons of water or milk• a pinch of salt and pepper• 1 teaspoon of butter• a choice of filling, such as grated cheese, finely chopped ham, chopped broccoli, salmon, and so on
Equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• bowl• fork• non-stick frying pan• slotted turner – preferably non scratch – for turning eggs in the pan• plate
How to make it	<p>Beat eggs, milk, salt and pepper in a small bowl until thoroughly mixed.</p> <p>Put the butter in a non-stick pan and put on the hob at a medium-high heat until warm and foaming but not burning</p> <p>Pour in the mixture and reduce the heat to medium.</p> <p>Gently loosen the mixture from the edge of the pan, towards the middle.</p> <p>Flip over if you like your eggs well done.</p> <p>Place filling on one half of the omelette and cover it with the other half.</p> <p>Slide omelette onto plate and serve immediately.</p>

Tuna Linguine (pasta)

Ingredients:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• about a third of 500g of dry Linguine• 1 tablespoon of olive oil• 1 tablespoon of chopped fresh flat leaf parsley (can substitute with dry version)• half a fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped• 1 garlic clove, finely chopped• 200g of passata (or canned chopped tomatoes)• 1 can of tuna, drained and separated• a pinch of salt and pepper
Equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• medium pan• non-stick frying pan• spoon• bowl
How to make it	<p>To prepare the sauce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• place the pan on medium heat and add the oil• add the garlic, ginger, half of the parsley and fry for a 1 minute on a low heat• add the passata or tinned tomatoes and let it simmer for another 3 or 4 minutes• gently stir in the tuna• season with salt and pepper to taste• simmer for a further 5 minutes <p>To prepare the pasta:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• bring about 750mls of water to boil gently• add a pinch of salt• boil the pasta according to the cooking instruction on the packet• drain and return to the pan• pour the tuna sauce over the pasta• sprinkle over the remaining parsley and serve in a bowl

Potato cakes

This is a great snack if you've got a few friends round but not much in the cupboards or in your wallet.

Ingredients:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 medium-size potatoes• 1 egg• 2 spoons of flour• cooking oil• mushrooms, cheese, other toppings (optional)
Equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cheese grater or potato peeler• frying pan• bowl
How to make it	<p>Clean and peel your potatoes.</p> <p>Use the largest holes on your cheese grater or a potato peeler to cut very thin strips of potato.</p> <p>Put these into a bowl (with thinly sliced mushrooms if you want to).</p> <p>Crack one egg into it and add two large spoons of flour.</p> <p>Add a little bit of salt and pepper.</p> <p>Mix the whole lot together with your hands. When it's all mixed together, it's ready for cooking.</p> <p>Put a little cooking oil in a frying pan and turn on to a medium heat.</p> <p>To make a potato cake, take a scoop of the mixture, plop it in the frying pan and spread it out so it's nice and thin.</p> <p>Repeat for more cakes.</p> <p>Cook both sides of the cakes for 5 to 7 minutes until they look crispy.</p> <p>Experiment with toppings like cheese or bacon.</p>

Spaghetti Bolognaise

Ingredients:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 packet of mince (beef) or Quorn mince for vegetarians• a packet of spaghetti• 1 jar of pasta sauce• mushrooms (optional)• half an onion (optional)• a tin of chopped tomatoes (optional)• cooking oil
Equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• medium-size saucepan• wok or large frying pan• sieve• chopping board• knife
How to make it	<p>Chop up some mushrooms and half an onion. If chopping onions makes your eyes water, you could try chopping it under cold running water, but take care with the chopping knife when doing so,</p> <p>Boil some water in the kettle and switch a hob ring on.</p> <p>While the kettle is boiling, put a small amount of cooking oil in the wok and turn up the heat on another hob ring.</p> <p>Once the water has boiled, put it in the saucepan along with a small fistful of spaghetti and a little pinch of salt.</p> <p>By now the oil in the wok should be heated up so add the mince and spread it out in the pan.</p> <p>Cook for a couple of minutes until it turns brown, and then add the tin of chopped tomatoes, mushrooms, onions and pasta sauce.</p> <p>Once it's bubbling away nicely, give it a stir from time to time and turn the heat down a bit if necessary.</p> <p>Your spaghetti should take about 10 minute's altogether.</p> <p>Take a small bit of it out the saucepan and try it. If it's still hard, you need to cook it for a bit longer.</p> <p>Once it's done, use a fork to make sure it's not sticking together, drain the water away with a sieve and serve onto the plates.</p> <p>Then simply add everything in the wok onto the plate and you've got yourself a tasty home cooked meal.</p>

Chicken stir-fry (or Quorn stir-fry for vegetarians)

You can find prepared stir-fry vegetables in the same section as all the other vegetables in the supermarket. They normally come in small packets with cellophane on the front. There are lots of different types, including ones with Chinese veg such as water chestnuts and bean sprouts.

Ingredients:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• small pack of chicken breasts (or Quorn pieces)• mushrooms• fresh vegetables or packet of prepared stir-fry vegetables• sauce (optional)• cooking oil
Equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wok or large frying pan• chopping board• knife
How to make it	<p>Put some cooking oil in a wok/large frying pan and put it on a medium heat.</p> <p>While the oil is heating, chop up the chicken breasts into small pieces (or take out your Quorn pieces out of the bag).</p> <p>Then wash the chopping board and knife, chop up the mushrooms and any other vegetables you have bought and leave them to one side.</p> <p>Now put the chicken (or Quorn) pieces in the pan and give them a stir to make sure they don't stick.</p> <p>Add some sauce such as plum sauce or soy sauce if you want (particularly with Quorn, as it can be a bit bland without extra flavouring).</p> <p>Cook the chicken pieces for a few minutes on their own (stirring occasionally) until the meat turns white then add the vegetables you chopped up earlier or a packet of prepared stir-fry vegetables.</p> <p>Now everything's in one pan it's simply a case of keeping an eye on it and stirring it from time to time.</p> <p>As long as the chicken is properly cooked, you can cook the vegetables according to taste. Some people like their veg. crunchy (which is healthy as the goodness stays in) and others like them well cooked.</p> <p>Once you're happy with everything, take a piece of chicken and veg and give them a try. If it tastes fine, serve it on to the plates and you're ready to go.</p>

Open Door social inclusion project

Living on your own can be a lonely experience. Open Door, a local charity within Thurrock, runs a project that helps Care Leavers develop their independent living skills.

Their programme contains 12 different modules with themes such as:

- housing
- finance and benefits
- food
- health and hygiene
- first aid
- drugs and alcohol

It also covers:

- social isolation
- meeting other care leavers
- developing support structures
- building confidence
- establishing independence
- develop skills and new interests

They aim to run 2 sessions per week and also have trips out.

This project would be a great place to build on the skills you already have and also develop new ones. You can find out more at [Open Door: Social Inclusion Project](#).