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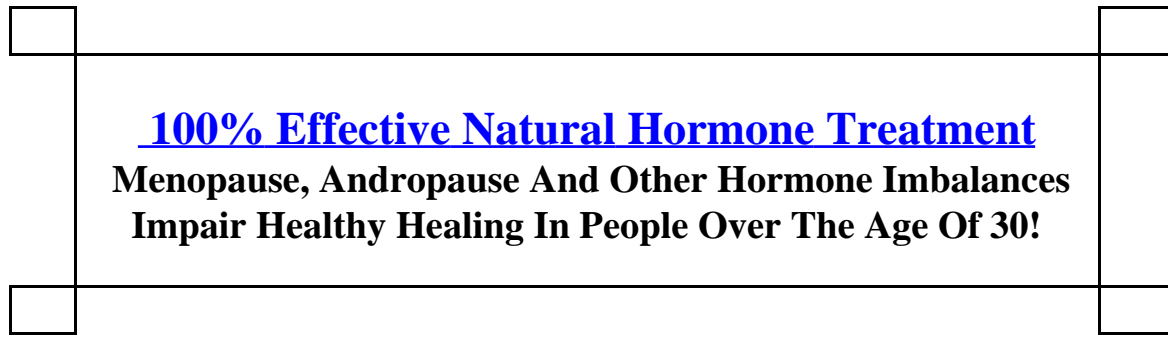


Table for One: The Apartment-Dweller's Dilemma

By dan the roommate man

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Although families are moving to multifamily housing in record numbers — and three-bedroom units are in demand like never before — apartment life remains a rite of passage for the young and unmarried, and twentysomethings still predominate in many apartment complexes. Even singles who enjoy cooking face the nightly dilemma from which no lone resident is exempt: What do you cook for dinner?

Once you locate a recipe (and for some of us, that's a leap we'll never make), do you have the time to prepare it? The desire to make the effort? And most important, you've got to like that dish a lot — because you're going to be eating it until you're 85, right? Single cooks often complain that they can't find recipes for one or two servings. Instead, they're written to serve six people, eight people, or small armies. Of course, you can put your mathematician's hat on, do the division, and whittle that recipe down to two servings (what's one-tenth of 2 cups?), but if you miscalculate, you're looking at a culinary disaster and a lot of wasted time.

All of this makes the bold assumption that you cook. Many, many singles don't. Some admit to cooking, but only for other people. We singles seem to have a confidence problem in the kitchen. We'll do it for others, but not for ourselves. So apartment-dwellers arrive home from work each night carrying not only their briefcases, but also their take-out boxes. And all of them will discover with time that avoiding their kitchens not only becomes old; it's also expensive. But the truth is that while we might think cooking for ourselves is expensive, it's not — particularly if you cook multiple portions which may then be frozen for later use. Cooking is actually far more cost-effective than relying on convenience foods.

It used to be that we headed to a restaurant to escape the grind, to enjoy a night out away from home. We wanted someone else to do the cooking and the cleanup, and we were quite happy to pay for that luxury. These days, however, we're eating less and less often at the restaurant, shunning candles and "I'll be your waiter this evening" for take-out — preferably ordered ahead of time by phone, so that we don't have to wait once we arrive at the restaurant.

Market research firm the NPD Group found that in 1996, more restaurant meals were taken out than eaten on premises. In contrast, 41 percent of restaurant meals were carried out 10 years before. 1996

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was the first year the pendulum swung in the other direction, and it marked the beginning of a trend that has continued and gained strength. The bottom line in 1998 is that consumers want their food prepared by a restaurant, but they don't necessarily want to eat it there. "Restaurants are becoming prepared–food supermarkets," says NPD's Harry Balzer.

Taking into consideration our changing demographics, NPD projects the fastest–growing restaurant meals from now until 2010 will be: weekday lunches at a restaurant without kids, up 80 million meals per year; weekend dinners at a restaurant without kids, up 61 million meals per year; and weekday dinners at a restaurant without kids, up 48 million meals per year.

According to recent surveys:

- * Americans, excluding those who live in institutions, eat more than one of every five meals at away–from–home eating establishments.
- * Fast–food restaurants serve four out of 10 meals eaten at away–from–home eating establishments.
- * Four out of 10 consumers say they have changed their eating out habits to reflect nutritional concerns.
- * Adults eat roughly 30 percent of their calories away from home.
- * Americans spend more than 40 cents of every food dollar on food eaten away from home.
- * Today, only 55 percent of dinners include one homemade dish. Ten years ago, the figure was 64 percent. The number of ingredients is also at an all–time low.
- * Dishes such as potatoes, bread, and salad are served less often. Vegetables, once in more than half of all dinners, are now served at only 43 percent of dinners.
- * The number of take–out dinners has more than doubled.

Source: Perspectives '97: Consumer Reviews, Trends, Forecasts; "Eating Patterns in America," an annual survey of 2,000 households conducted by the NPD Group

Home meal replacement ("HMR") is a single person's mantra. HMR is everywhere — in restaurants both mainstream and upscale, in supermarkets, and at eating establishments that specifically market themselves as HMR providers — with a few tables and chairs thrown in for good measure, of course. Appetizers, entrees, salads, side dishes, breads, desserts (and wines and spirits) are packed up and ready to go and usually just require a quick reheating before you serve them. While it's a handy alternative, and many of these establishments are well–stocked with nearly anything your stomach desires, consumers pay for convenience, and sometimes they pay dearly.

According to Census Bureau data, the average single person earns \$28,000 per year, while the average married couple earns nearly \$49,000. The bureau has also found that single people save less than marrieds; the average single saves \$1,300 per year, while married couples manage to stash an average of \$3,521. So it behooves a single person to think about putting that chef's hat on every once and a while. After the initial expense of buying a few ingredient staples, it's a good idea to put aside your ideas about dividing a recipe down to one or two servings, and instead following it to the letter. Spending a half–hour in the kitchen on a dish that will last you several nights is a time–saving strategy. After all, if you're entering the kitchen either every night or every other night to start cooking all over again, cooking may soon become a chore.

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While there's too much variance among consumers to determine how much money the average person could save by brown–bagging it to work, or merely cutting down on business/social lunches, it goes without saying that if you're used to going out every day, ordering drinks and/or appetizers and/or dessert, and paying a tip, you're going to see substantial savings if you start packing your lunches, at least occasionally. While it's a conservative estimate, let's say you spend \$5 each weekday on food — that could be your morning cup of coffee, or a relatively inexpensive lunch out with your co–workers. That's \$100 per month, or \$1,200 per year. Keeping a spending diary will quickly open your eyes. If you purchase the insomniac's special — a jumbo latte — for \$3 every morning before you face the office, that's \$60 a month.

If you've seen the light and have committed to gracing your kitchen with your presence — but you're stumped for ideas — go online. It's a cook's paradise — even a single cook's paradise. You'll find everything on the Internet, from simple recipes to more adventurous ones. And for those of you who want to see what the finished product will look like, you'll occasionally find pictures online, as well. Some suggested sites include

Pillsbury

CompuCook

Southern Living Online

Safeway.com

Cooking Light Online

all of which have comprehensive, easy–to–use recipe indexes for all skill levels.

If your idea of a kitchen is a room where you store your empty take–out boxes, consider these tips before you begin your next culinary adventure:

* Although you might be tempted to divide a recipe that feeds four or more, many cooks find that the recipe doesn't turn out as successfully if they attempt to modify it. It's best to follow the recipe exactly, then freeze your extra portions. You've just saved yourself time and effort, because you'll have at least two meals — if not more — ready to defrost, and you'll appreciate them on nights when you're tired and have no desire to cook.

* Water boils more quickly when you cover your pot with a lid.

* If you're planning to cook vegetables along with your pasta, toss them into the water a few minutes before your pasta is ready. You'll have less to clean up later.

* If you're cooking pasta (a single person's friend — it's both versatile and inexpensive), cook enough for two nights.

* Get a Crock Pot. You can toss in as little or as much as you like, and you can't possibly make a mistake.

So get familiar with that kitchen of yours. It may be a galley, but it's still home. What have you got to

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lose, other than money?

Since 1989 dan the roommate man has helped 1000's of people find roommates. Need help? Contact him at 800–487–8050 or www.roommateexpress.com

WHEN CAN YOUR LANDLORD ENTER YOUR APARTMENT?

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In renting an apartment or a house you will lose some of your privacy rights.

Anyone Home? Your landlord will be able to enter your home to make repairs and in certain cases to make inspections. Your lease should outline when and how your landlord will be able to enter your apartment. If your lease does not specify this your landlord may be able to enter without giving you advanced notification.

Your lease should state:

WHEN: Your landlord should be able to enter only during reasonable hours. 2:00 A.M. is not reasonable.

HOW: Generally he should give you 24 hour notice.

WHY: He must have a sound reason for entering your home such as making a needed repair or to make a necessary inspections. A valid inspection would be to check for leaks or ensuring that his no–pet policy is being followed. Your landlord cannot enter your apartment just to snoop around.

EMERGENCIES – In this case when life and property are at risk as in the case of a fire or broken water pipe no notice is needed.

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