Let's cook!

Healthy cooking on a budget



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Hello and welcome!

Welcome to Let's Cook, our five-week online cooking course.

Let's Cook will help you to prepare delicious and healthy, budget-friendly meals and snacks at home using a slow cooker.

From hearty stews and soups to pastas and brilliant breakfasts, you'll be making food the whole family can enjoy.

We'll start with an introduction to slow cooking and healthy eating, before learning how to confidently read food labels and create a store cupboard.

Then you'll discover how to shop on a budget, creating personalised meal plans for your family and a shopping list you can stick to.

You'll also learn how to create your own 'fakeaways' – your favourite takeaway meals at home – using your slow cooker, as well as breads and desserts.

By the end of the course, you'll have a firm understanding of the food groups, learning about the importance of fruits and vegetables, protein, carbohydrates and dairy. We'll also cover the Eatwell Guide to ensure you and your family are enjoying a healthy balanced diet that tastes delicious.

Enjoy the course and bon appétit!



Healthy eating

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is an important part of maintaining good health, and can help you feel your best.

This means eating a wide variety of foods in the right proportions, and the right amount of food and drink to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

Anyone with special dietary needs or a medical condition should ask their doctor or a registered dietitian for advice.

To have a healthy balanced diet, the Eatwell Guide suggests you should:

- eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- base meals on higher fibre starchy foods like potatoes, bread, rice or pasta
- have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks)
- eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein
- choose unsaturated oils and spreads, and eat them in small amounts
- drink plenty of fluids at least six to eight glasses a day

If you're consuming foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar, try to have them less often and in small amounts.

Also try a variety of different foods from the five main food groups to get a wide range of nutrients.

The Eatwell Guide does not apply to children under the age of two because they have different nutritional needs.

Children between the ages of two and five years should gradually move to eating the same foods as the rest of the family in the proportions shown in the Eatwell Guide.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals and fibre and should make up just over a third of the food you eat each day.

It's recommended that you eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. These can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or juiced.



People who eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day generally have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

Eating five portions of fruit and vegetables is not as hard as it sounds. A portion is:

- 80g of fresh, canned or frozen fruit and vegetables
- 30g of dried fruit which should be kept to mealtimes
- 150ml glass of fruit juice or smoothie but do not have more than one portion a day as these drinks are sugary and can damage teeth

Carbohydrates

Starchy foods should make up just over a third of everything you eat.

Choose wholegrain or wholemeal varieties of starchy foods, such as brown rice, wholewheat pasta, and brown, wholemeal or higher fibre white bread.

They contain more fibre, and usually more vitamins and minerals, than white varieties.

Potatoes with the skins on are a great source of fibre and vitamins. For example, when having boiled potatoes or a jacket potato, eat the skin too.

Dairy

Milk and dairy foods, such as cheese and yoghurt, are good sources of protein. They also contain calcium, which helps keep your bones healthy.

Go for lower fat and lower sugar products where possible.

Choose semi-skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk, as well as lower fat hard cheeses or cottage cheese, and lower fat, lower sugar yoghurt.

Dairy alternatives, such as soya drinks, are also included in this food group.

When buying alternatives, choose unsweetened, calcium-fortified versions.



Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

These foods are all good sources of protein, which is essential for the body to grow and repair itself.

They're also good sources of a range of vitamins and minerals.

Meat is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals, including iron, zinc and B vitamins. It's also one of the main sources of vitamin B12.

Choose lean cuts of meat and skinless poultry whenever possible to cut down on fat. Always cook meat thoroughly.

Try to eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.

Eggs and fish are also good sources of protein, and contain many vitamins and minerals. Oily fish is particularly rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

Aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week, including one portion of oily fish.

You can choose from fresh, frozen or canned, but remember that canned and smoked fish can often be high in salt.

Pulses, including beans, peas and lentils, are naturally very low in fat and high in fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Nuts are high in fibre, and unsalted nuts make a good snack. But they do still contain high levels of fat, so eat them in moderation.

Oils and spreads

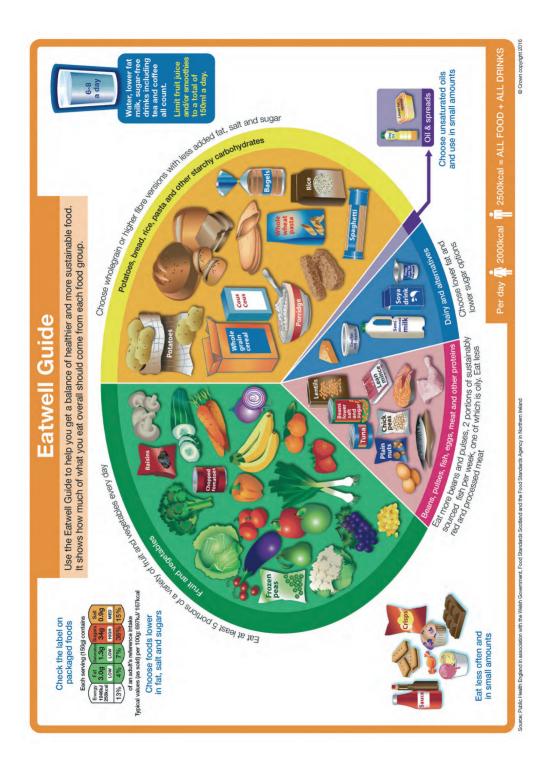
Some fat in the diet is essential, but on average we eat too much saturated fat.

It's important to get most of your fat from unsaturated oils and spreads.

Swapping to unsaturated fats can help lower cholesterol.

Remember that all types of fat are high in energy and should be eaten in small amounts.





Weekly Meal Planner

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Weekly shopping list

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Cupboard Essentials

In order to cook family-friendly budget recipes, it's good to have a few store cupboard essentials. These staple ingredients will form the base of most of your meals.

They are basic ingredients that are cheap and have a long shelf-life.

Below is a list of our store cupboard staples. Why don't you buy one or two items from the list each week, that way you can build up your own supply and when you use them, simply add them back to your shopping list!

Tinned tomatoes

Tinned tomatoes in juice are a versatile ingredient. They can be made into a simple sauce for pasta, as well as forming the base of a spaghetti bolognese, chilli or lasagne.

Tomato puree

Used in combination with tinned tomatoes, it too can form the base of many meals.

Tinned tuna in water

Tinned tuna is a useful ingredient to have to hand. It can be used to make simple tuna sandwiches for packed lunches, top a salad or jacket potato or in a tuna pasta bake for dinner.

Herbs and spices

Adding flavour is important when it comes to cooking. Dried herbs and spices such as salt, pepper, paprika, chilli flakes, oregano, thyme, curry powder, garlic and vegetable/chicken stock cubes are an inexpensive way of doing that and have the advantage of a long shelf-life.

Oil

Rapeseed, sunflower or olive oil are great for cooking with and making dressings for salads.

Pasta

Consider swapping to wholewheat pasta, higher in fibre. It is a filling choice and will keep for a long time in your cupboard ready for a quick evening meal.

Onions

A basic ingredient that contributes towards your five a day. Onions are a versatile ingredient whether you are making a cooked dish or a salad. They keep well stored in a cool, dark place without needing to be refrigerated.



Tinned pulses

Pulses are a good ingredient to bulk out meat dishes as well as being a vegetarian source of protein. Dried pulses keep well too but when they are tinned in water they are ready to eat making them a quick and easy choice.

Plain flour

A bag of plain flour can be useful for making pancakes and scones, as well as to thicken a white sauce or casserole.

Potatoes

Whether they are baking potatoes, sweet potatoes or new potatoes, these root vegetables keep well when stored in a cool, dark place. Eat them with their skins on to benefit from some extra fibre.

Tinned fruit in juice

Tinned fruit keeps for ages and will count towards your five a day. It can be a good way of getting fruit in your diet like peaches, apricots and pineapples.

Dried fruit

Dried fruits such as sultanas, apricots, figs and dates are all useful for adding sweetness to breakfasts, stewed fruit and adding to stews and casseroles. Dried fruit contributes to your five a day and can also be a source of nutrients like fibre and iron.

Bread

It's always useful to have a sliced loaf of wholegrain bread in the freezer. If you don't get through bread quickly, having it ready sliced means you don't have to defrost the whole thing in one go. Just take out individual slices as and when you need them.

Eggs

At breakfast, lunch and dinner, eggs are a quick to cook source of protein and keep well. Use them for poached eggs, boiled eggs or scrambled eggs.

Milk

Whether it's for hot drinks, on cereal, or to make a white sauce, milk is in most of our fridges. Using low-fat milks like semi-skimmed, 1% or skimmed milk will help to reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet. Consider buying long-life milk as it is cheaper.

Plain yoghurt

Use it for breakfast with cereals, to make dips or to have with fruit as a pudding. A pot of plain yogurt is useful to keep in the fridge and can be more versatile than fruit flavoured ones.



Top Tips for Budget Eating

Meal planning is a great way to budget. Not only does it reduce the chance of impulse buys, it makes the most of the ingredients you already have.

By creating a plan, you and your family can eat healthier for less.

Tips

- Often we pay more for convenience, so whilst you're shopping make sure to stock up on bits for lunches, snacks and treats. This could include: multipack yogurts (calcium), fresh/tinned/dried fruit (fruit salad turn to page), tinned rice pudding, packets of jelly, value crisps, biscuits, and cucumber/carrots/dip (great for snacking and they look pretty too, get inventive).
- Look out for special offers, often known as yellow stickers, on breads. Freeze on the day of purchase and take out what you need to defrost each day.
- Make big one pot meals like chilli, lasagne, spaghetti bolognese or a stew, then freeze and defrost when you need to. This can help when you haven't got the time to prepare a meal.
- Try going meat-free once a week. Not only is it good for your health, it's also good for your wallet and the environment.
- Consider buying frozen meat and veg for the week too. You can make big savings.
- Over 10 million tonnes of wonky vegetables are thrown away every year in the UK because they don't look perfect. Apart from their appearance, wonky veg is no different to 'normal' vegetables. Not only does it reduce food waste, wonky veg is also cheaper. Look out for words such as 'Wonky/Odd' on your next food shop.
- Consider swapping branded products for a combination of supermarket own brand and value products. Again, you can make big savings.



Beef Bourguignon

Servings: 4



Ingredients

- 500g diced beef, fat removed
- 2 tbsp. cornflour
- 4 smoked bacon medallions, diced
- 2 medium onions, peeled and chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed
- 3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 250g mushrooms, halved
- 300ml beef stock, 1 beef stock cube made up with water
- 2 red wine stock pots
- 2 tbsp. tomato puree
- 1 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. dried parsley
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 2 dried bay leaves
- Salt and pepper



Turn over for directions

- 1. Place the beef in a bowl and sprinkle over the cornflour, salt and black pepper. Mix to coat.
- 2. Spray a large frying pan with low calorie cooking spray and place over a medium high heat. When the frying pan is hot, add the beef and fry for about three to four minutes, turning to seal and brown on all sides. Place the beef in the slow cooker.
- 3. Lower the heat to medium and spray the frying pan again with low calorie cooking spray. Add the bacon, scraping up any meaty bits from the bottom of the frying pan and stir in. Fry the bacon for four to five minutes until cooked and lightly browned around the edges. Add the bacon to the beef in the slow cooker pot.
- 4. Spray the frying pan again if needed and place on a medium heat. Add the onion and fry for five minutes until it softens and turns golden, again scraping up any meaty bits in the frying pan and stirring in. Add the garlic and cook for a further one to two minutes.
- 5. Add the carrots and mushrooms and cook for four to five minutes to lightly brown. Add the vegetables to the slow cooker.
- 6. In a measuring jug, mix the hot stock, red wine stock pots, tomato puree, balsamic vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, thyme and bay leaves. Stir until the stock pots have dissolved. Pour into the slow cooker pot and stir into the beef and vegetables.
- 7. Cover with the lid and turn the slow cooker onto the high setting. Cook for four to five hours. The stew will be ready when the beef is tender, and the gravy has thickened. Season to taste if needed.
- 8. Remove the bay leaves and serve with steamed vegetables or other accompaniment of your choice.

Pasta Bolognese

Servings: 4



- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 medium carrot, chopped or grated
- 1 celery stalk, chopped or grated
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 500g of 5% fat beef mince or 500g of vegetarian mince (fresh or frozen)
- 1 red wine stock pot
- 2 tbsp of tomato puree
- 500g of tomato passata
- A pinch of salt and pepper
- 2 whole bay leaves
- 4 tbsp of milk
- 150ml of water.



- 1. Heat the olive oil in your slow cooker and place over a low heat.
- 2. Chop or grate the carrot, celery and onion and add to the pot, stirring occasionally until the onion is transparent.
- 3. Increase the heat to medium and add the beef or vegetarian mince. Stir to break up the pieces. Once the mince has browned, turn the heat up to high and add the red wine stock pot along with 150ml water.
- 4. Turn the heat to low and add the tomato puree, passata, salt, pepper and bay leaves. Stir altogether.
- 5. Place on high for 3 to 4 hours, or low for 6 to 8 hours.
- 6. Once cooked, and before serving, remove the bay leaves and add the milk. Stir to combine.
- 7. Serve over cooked pasta.

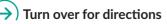
Slow cooker honey mustard chicken thighs



Servings: 4

- 1 tbsp. butter
- 8 chicken thighs, de-skinned and de-boned
- 8 spring onions, cut into lengths
- 150ml chicken stock
- 1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 2 tbsp. double cream or crème fraiche
- 100g frozen peas

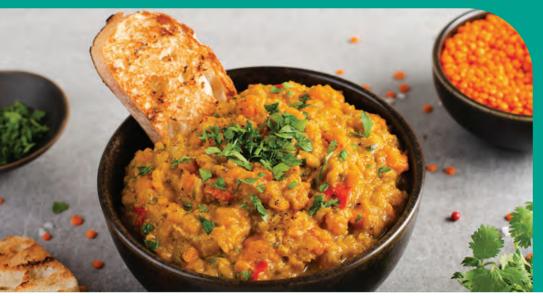




- 1. Heat the slow cooker. Melt the butter in a frying pan and quickly brown the chicken thighs all over. Make sure the skin picks up plenty of colour. Season, then put them in the slow cooker. Brown the spring onions and add them to the slow cooker as well. Add the stock, mustard and honey and cook on low for four hours.
- Stir in the cream or crème fraiche and peas, then cook for a further 15 minutes with the lid off. If you want, re-crisp up the chicken skin under the grill.

Lentil Dhal

Servings: 6



- 1 tsp of olive oil or coconut oil
- 2 onions, diced
- 3 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon of fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- ½ tsp dried of chilli flakes
- ½ tsb of ground cumin
- ½ tsp of ground coriander
- ½ tsp of mustard powder or mustard
- 2 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 200g red lentils (rinsed and drained)
- 1 can (400ml) of chopped tomatoes
- 1 can (400ml) of coconut milk
- 2 cups (500ml) of vegetable broth or stock
- Salt and pepper
- Juice of half a lemon
- 2 handfuls fresh spinach washed



- 1. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the onion and cook gently for 5 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger and red chilli and cook for a few more minutes.
- 2. Add the cumin, coriander and mustard powder or mustard to the frying pan, along with the turmeric and garam masala and cook for 1 minute.
- 3. Add the onion mixture to the bowl of the slow cooker, along with the lentils, tomatoes, coconut milk and broth or stock. Place the lid on the slow cooker and cook on high for 4 to 5 hours or on low for 8 to 10 hours.
- 4. Taste and cook for longer if necessary until the lentils are soft. Season with salt and pepper and stir in the lemon juice and spinach.

Chicken Shawarma

Servings: 6 to 8



- 1–1.2kg/10 to12 chicken thighs, de-skinned and de-boned
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- 1 large lemon, juiced
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 2-3 large onions, very thickly sliced into rounds
- Few pinches dried oregano
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 2 tsp. turmeric
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp. salt
- Warmed pitta, flatbread or wraps
- Chopped salad ingredients



- 1. Marinate the chicken overnight for best results. Mix the spice mix ingredients in a food bag or bowl then sprinkle over the chicken thighs. Use your hands to massage the spices all over the meat. Cover and leave in the fridge overnight or for as long as you have time for.
- 2. Turn the slow cooker to high to heat up. In a jug, whisk the garlic, lemon juice and olive oil with a fork. Drizzle a bit in the base of the slow cooker and then add the chicken. Arrange the thighs at angles to fit in snugly and to create an even layer with no gaps. Drizzle the rest of the lemony oil over the top. Cook on low for six hours or on high for three hours, until the chicken is falling apart and still juicy.
- 3. Turn the slow cooker off and preheat the grill. Lay the onion rounds on a baking tray, brush the tops with some of the juices from the slow cooker, season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with half of the oregano. Flip the onions over and repeat. Grill for two to four minutes on each side until the onions are well charred.

Tomato Soup

Servings: 4



Ingredients

- 250 g (2 cups) Sweet Potato peeled and diced. This equates to roughly one baking sized potato. Use white potato as an alternative
- 150g (1.2 cups) carrots equates to two medium carrots, peeled and chopped.
- 2, 400g cans of peeled plum tomatoes
- 1 white onion
- 4 tbsp. tomato puree
- 2 vegetable stock cubes
- 1 tsp. dried basil
- 1 tsp. paprika
- ½ tsp. garlic granules
- ½ tsp. celery salt
- ½ tsp. sugar
- 150 ml milk
- 250 ml water
- Pinch of ground black pepper



Turn over for directions

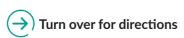
- 1. Peel and dice the vegetables into chunks of around 2cm or less. Add these to the slow cooker.
- 2. Add all of the remaining ingredients apart from the milk. Stir them together.
- 3. Cook on high for four hours or low for six hours.
- 4. Check that the soup mixture is completely cooked through. The onions will be translucent and the vegetables can be easily sliced through with a knife. Then add the milk and cook for a further 15 minutes on high.
- 5. Next, carefully transfer the soup mixture to a jug blender and pulse until smooth. You can also do this with a stick blender directly in the slow cooker.
- 6. Serve immediately or allow to cool and store in the fridge or freezer.





- 500g (4 cups) flour strong white bread flour
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 tsp. dried, active yeast
- 2 tsp, salt
- 1½ tsp. castor sugar
- 290ml warm water
- 2 tbsp. flour for kneading





- 1. Activate the yeastby filling a jug with lukewarm water and stir in half of the sugar, then the yeast. Leave for 10 minutes to foam on the surface.
- 2. Add the flour, remaining sugar and salt to a large mixing bowl and stir to combine. If mixing by hand, make a well in the middle and gradually pour in the yeast water and then the oil stirring to combine the flour and liquid.
- 3. Once a dough begins to form, remove to a floured surface and knead by hand for 10 to15 minutes.
- Check the consistency of the dough to ensure it has been kneaded enough to rise and maintain its shape. For this loaf the dough should be stiff and slightly tacky to the touch.
- 5. Shape the dough in a large ball, cover with a damp tea towel and leave to ferment (first proof) for between 45 minutes 1 hour 15 minutes depending on the temperature of the room or proofing area. The yeast will activate faster in warmer rooms.
- 6. The dough will be doubled in size and have a smooth, smooth texture.
- 7. Remove the dough to a floured surface and knead for 1 minute to knock the air out of the dough. Shape the dough into a smooth ball then score the surface with a sharp knife in a cross pattern and set aside.
- 8. Take a piece of baking parchment and line the base and sides of the slow cooker. Fold any areas where the paper overlaps to create a neat lining then switch the slow cooker to high and leave to heat up with the lid on for around 20 minutes.
- 9. Carefully place the ball of dough in the slow cooker resting on the paper.
- 10. Take two to three sheets of kitchen paper (with the joining sections of the paper intact) and rest these across the top of the slow cooker pot. Trap it in place with the lid of the slow cooker. Bake on high for two hours.
- 11. After the dough is baked, remove it from the pot by lifting via the edges of the baking parchment. The loaf will be brown on the top as it has not been in direct contact with a heat source. In fact, the base of the loaf will be firmer and more browned where it has been directly over the heating elements. To create a golden brown crust, remove the bread from the baking parchment and place under a medium heat grill for 3-5 minutes.
- 12. Once the crust is golden, remove from the heat and set aside on a baking rack to cool. At this point you can paint the loaf with butter or oil (around 1 tsp.) to create a gleam to the surface and moisten any dry areas of the crust.

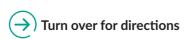
Banana Bread

Servings: 8



- 275g self-raising flour sifted
- 3 bananas medium and ripe, peeled and mashed
- 120g butter unsalted, softened
- 110g caster sugar superfine sugar
- 65g brown sugar
- 2 eggs large
- 1½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt finely ground





- 1. Line the slow cooker with kitchen foil. To measure the correct size, cut a length of foil which is as long as the outer rim of the slow cooker pot.
- 2. Push the piece of foil into the base of the pot and smooth the foil against the sides so it is neatly lined.
- 3. Measure out a piece of baking parchment to hold the cake mixture. Pull out a length of baking parchment across the length of the slow cooker pot then add an extra 3cm of paper overhanging on each side and cut.
- 4. Push the paper into the base of the pot, flattening the paper along the bottom and then folding any overlapping areas over around the sides neatly.
- 5. Pre-heat the slow cooker. Replace the lid of the pot and set on high for 20 minutes.
- 6. In a bowl peel and then mash the bananas into a puree.
- 7. Add the butter and both types of sugar to a large mixing bowl and mix together.
- 8. Gradually add the flour, baking powder and salt to the mixture followed by the eggs. Mix together well to form a dense batter.
- 9. Stir through the mashed bananas. The batter will become looser and wetter.
- 10. Pour the banana bread mixture into the baking parchment lining in the slow cooker.
- 11. Place four joined sheets of kitchen paper over the top of the pot (doubled over so that two sheets lay across the top of the slow cooker). This will absorb any additional moisture in the slow cooker and prevent the cake from becoming soggy whilst it cooks.
- 12. Trap the paper in place by placing the lid over the top, then set the slow cooker to cook on high for a minimum of two hours 15 minutes. Do not open the lid whilst the cake is cooking, this would allow the heat to escape from the cooker and affect the rise of the cake.
- 13. After the cooking time, test the cake is cooked by gently pressing down on the top of the banana bread. If it is cooked, the sponge should have some resistance and spring back up immediately. A second test is to take a kitchen skewer and pierce the middle of the cake, the skewer will pull out cleanly if it is cooked through. If it comes out with traces of batter then replace the lid and cook for further 15 minute intervals until the skewer comes out of the cake cleanly.
- 14. Once cooked, remove the cake from the slow cooker pot by lifting up the edges of the baking paper. Set the cake on a baking rack to cool. Once cooled, peel away the paper, slice and enjoy!



Servings: 4



- 1 egg white
- 125g jumbo oats
- 3 tbsp. honey
- 75g mixed nuts and fruit
- ½ a tsp. ground cinnamon



- 1. Whisk the egg whites until light and fluffy, but not stiff.
- 2. Mix in all of the other ingredients until coated well.
- 3. Pour into the slow cooker and cook on high. Leave the lid on, but slightly ajar to let the moisture out. Stir it gently just to check it's not sticking after one hour. It will take two to three hours to cook. Stop it cooking when it's just starting to get crunchy (it won't be fully crunchy, only around the edges, the rest will 'crunch' as it cools.)
- 4. Pour it out onto a baking sheet or sheet of baking paper to let it cool and harden. Store in an airtight container when it's cold.



Servings: 4

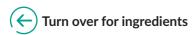


- 160g jumbo oats
- 1,900ml milk
- 1 tsp. salt, optional





- 1. Mix all ingredients in the slow cooker. Put the lid on.
- 2. Set your timer to start cooking 3 hours before your breakfast time.
- 3. Top with honey, fruit or nuts.





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