

The slow cooker makes a comeback

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(HealthDay)—You might think of a slow cooker as your grandma's favorite timesaver, but this countertop device has many modern benefits— from making healthier meals and cutting calories to saving

you time at the stove.

Because almost all you need to do is cut, measure and add ingredients, you can set a slow cooker in the morning and have a meal ready when everyone rushes in at dinnertime. That's a nutritious and inexpensive alternative to [fast food](#).

A slow cooker draws the maximum flavor from the ingredients you put in and makes delicious dishes with little or no added fat. It's also a great way to make less expensive cuts of meat more tender. Do rub the inside of the machine with a few drops of oil or spray it with nonstick cooking spray before using for easier cleanup—or use a special liner made for the purpose. Always carefully clean it out afterwards.

Adding lots of vegetables to a one-pot meal means you don't have to worry about cooking separate side dishes to get in vegetable servings. Just place them in first, then add your protein and liquid in that order for the most even cooking. Note: Cutting larger pieces of [food](#) into small pieces will also ensure that everything cooks evenly. Typically, you'll fill the slow cooker between half and two-thirds full, but follow all manufacturer directions to get the best results.

For safety, don't use frozen food. That's because bacteria could develop during the thawing process. Thaw any frozen ingredients in the fridge the night before.

More information: Penn State University Extension has more tips for using a [slow cooker](#).

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