No Kitchen? No Problem! Dining in Your Dorm Room

No time to stand in line at campus eating establishments? Trying to pay closer attention to the ingredients in the food you eat? Would you like to save money by preparing food yourself using food from the grocery store? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, but happen to live on campus, you may think it’s next to impossible make healthy meals without access to a full kitchen. But that simply isn’t so. While UTSA offers a wide variety of locations to eat, and can accommodate a variety of taste preferences and special dietary concerns, sometimes, you just want to make your own food, in your own room, all by yourself.

It helps if you have a few convenient tools. Start out with a decent knife, a cutting board, a microwave-safe mixing bowl, a microwaveable coffee mug, and a can opener. A blender (regular, worktop) and/or immersion blender (the kind that look like a large wand that you place down into the food you want to chop/blend) can come in handy too. And it’s a good idea to have large and small plastic zipper bags as well as plastic containers with lids to make good use of leftovers. While some small appliances aren’t allowed in UTSA dorms, like toasters, hot plates, etc., you ARE allowed to have appliances without an exposed heating coil/element, like a George Foreman grill or a panini maker. Gadgets like these certainly add the variety of meals you can create in your dorm, but aren’t essential; you can make all sorts of things without them.

While it’s tempting to fill yourself up on snack foods while in your dorm (chips, crackers, granola bars, dry cereal) remember that it’s important to choose foods from all food groups to stay healthy – many college students (and all Americans, actually) don’t get enough fruits and veggies each day. And when snacking, many people overlook protein. Check out the recipes below for ideas on how to healthfully put together simple meals, without the need for a full kitchen.

PB&B Oatmeal Cookie in a Mug
Mash ½ a banana in the bottom of a large microwave-safe mug. Stir in a tablespoon or so of peanut butter and a teaspoon of honey. Add a tablespoon of milk, 4 tablespoons of oats (rolled or quick) and some nuts or raisins. Mix all ingredients and then microwave for a minute or until firm to the touch on top (microwave times will vary). The limited amount of milk/liquid used to make this oatmeal is what makes it more of a “cookie” rather than a regular bowl of oatmeal. To save time in the morning, you can mix up this “cookie” in the evening and store it in the fridge overnight – a quick zap in the microwave in the morning and your healthy oatmeal cookie is ready to go when you are!

Coffee Cup Egg Scramble
After spraying a large coffee cup with non-stick spray, add your desired amount of eggs and/or egg whites to the cup. Beat the eggs with a fork and microwave on high for about 45 seconds (or until desired doneness). Season with salt, pepper and enjoy! Super-easy with minimal clean up! And you can add flavor and “nutritional punch” to these eggs by getting creative with your “add ins” – think baby spinach leaves with feta,
chopped red onions and goat cheese, shredded cheddar and green onions, pico de gallo, salsa, torn pieces of pre-cooked turkey bacon, etc. You may have to adjust your microwave time based on the thickness of your mug and number of eggs you are cooking.

Yogurt/Berry Parfait with Graham Cracker “Crust”
Place a graham cracker at the bottom of cup or single-serving (small) plastic container. Spread a layer of vanilla Greek yogurt (if you’re watching calories, choose a low fat, lower sugar version) and then a layer of berries (fresh or frozen). Repeat layers until you get to the top. You can save money by buying a bag of frozen berries and a large container of vanilla yogurt. Save time by making several parfaits at one time – you’ll have no excuse to skip what many call the most important meal of the day.

Tex-Mex Rice Bowl
Chop a small tomato and avocado into small pieces. Pop a pouch of Uncle Ben’s Ready Rice – whole grain brown https://www.unclebens.com/products/ready-rice/whole-grain-brown (tearing to vent according to package instructions) for 90 seconds. While rice is cooking, open a can of no-salt added black beans (or whatever kind of beans you love) – rinse them. When rice is done, carefully open the package (it will be hot) and put your desired amount of rice in a microwave-safe bowl – 1 packet makes two 1-cup servings, so you’ll probably have enough rice for tomorrow’s meal too. Add desired amount of black beans to the rice and re-heat the rice/beans together. Remove from microwave and stir in the chopped tomato and avocado, along with a squeeze of fresh lime, salt and pepper, and a dash of cumin. A spoonful of plain Greek yogurt (rather than sour cream) stirred into this dish makes it really creamy and good, while adding a tad more protein and some calcium too!

Chinese Chicken Teriyaki Bowl
Place frozen stir fry vegetables in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave for 2 minutes or until defrosted (covering the bowl in plastic wrap will prevent splattering; you can also place the bag on the counter for 20 min to defrost). HEB sells several varieties of “stir fry” vegetable assortments for your veggie-loving convenience – you can choose broccoli stir fry, sugar snap stir fry, or green bean stir fry. Add left over brown rice (see Tex-Mex Rice Bowl above) and microwave the rice and veggies together until heated. Add chicken – you can tear slices of sandwich meat chicken breast or use pre-cooked chicken pieces (available in the deli and/or frozen foods section). Drizzle with your favorite teriyaki sauce and enjoy!

Confetti Chicken/Tuna Salad and Canned Soup
Chop about ¾ cup – or more - of broccoli slaw/”rainbow salad” (in bagged coleslaw section of produce area) into tiny pieces and place in mixing bowl. Add one 10-oz can (drained) of canned chicken breast (or you could use tuna – or one smaller can of each!). Add 4 tablespoons light mayo and 2 tablespoons honey mustard as well as Lowry’s reduced sodium seasoning salt and pepper to taste – mix completely. Serve on whole wheat crackers with a microwavable can of soup. Campbell’s Healthy Request line is generally healthy, as are most bean, minestrone, and lentil canned soups – it’s
best to choose a “reduced sodium” soup. You don’t really have to measure out anything in this chicken salad – just mix all the ingredients to suit your tastebuds. And the more slaw you add the better – more fiber, more vitamins, more minerals. Make a big batch and have it with crackers and soup one day and on a sandwich with a side of fruit the next.

And these are only a few ideas – quesadillas made with whole wheat tortillas, beans, cheese, and chopped veggies/salsa/pico de gallo are easy and good too! For more healthy-eating ideas or to address your specific nutrition-related concerns, be sure to set up a nutrition assessment with Campus Recreation’s registered dietitian, Annie Bell. Appointments are individualized to address your needs, questions, concerns and last about an hour – oh, and they’re free! Full instructions on how to register for your appointment are here: https://campusrec.utsa.edu/nutritionregistration