Mystery Meal or Culinary Delight
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It is time to eat. You open the fridge and find some brown rice or a small piece of meat or some leftover vegetables or (fill in the blank) … or all of the above. How can this possibly become a meal? Here are some tips on converting a mystery meal of leftovers into a culinary delight.

Start by considering what you have available. To minimize the grocery bill and for food safety’s sake, check the leftovers first. Then see what is on hand in the pantry, refrigerator and freezer. Look for interesting ways to combine what is available. Choose a vegetable or combination of vegetables. Fresh, frozen and canned are good sources of many nutrients. Add a starch. It could be a starchy vegetable like potatoes or dried beans, or a grain like brown rice, whole wheat pasta or couscous. Include a little meat, fish, or eggs for some protein. Dairy foods can be included to flavor the meal or as part of a sauce. Keep in mind that sauces can be ready-to-eat sauces like spaghetti sauce, or easy to create sauces like cottage cheese or stewed tomatoes.

Next look for the spices, sauce or condiments that will make the ordinary extraordinary. Sometimes all it takes is to change up the seasonings of food to create a new and interesting flavor with familiar mundane foods. University of Missouri Extension has several publications available online at http://extension.missouri.edu or by contacting the local MU Extension office. For example, MU Extension publication N362 Herbs and Spices describes which herbs and spices complement which types of food. On http://missourifamilies.org the handout called Help for Hypertension – A Dietary Guide gives recipes for salt-free herb blends such as Chinese Five-Spice, Italian Blend, Curry Blend, and Mexican Chili Blend, to name just a few. And if the specific ingredient needed is not available, In a Pinch: Ingredient Substitution is a helpful guide.

Another option is to add a little of this and a little to that to a pizza, macaroni and cheese or other casserole or pancakes. The New Missouri Mix, MU Extension publication GH1055, has some great recipes for easy, inexpensive sides to dress up the meal. It starts with a basic baking mix then gives recipes for such possibilities as biscuits, cobbler, pancakes, or muffins.

For more information on making a mystery meal into a culinary delight or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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