

How to Enjoy Your Leftovers

How do we “Recycle” food? We can use leftover foods creatively, and not just reheat and eat. Limp, soggy leftovers can seem unappealing. “Not THAT again!!” Many people get in a habit of buying processed frozen meals in boxes or bags, or fast food takeout. However, leftover foods can often be combined with a few basic ingredients to create new healthy meals. Knowing how to use leftover food effectively saves time in the kitchen as well as money. Many dishes, such as the **CHILI RECIPE** on page 2, actually taste BETTER the next day.

Planning is important, especially if you are cooking double batches at one time to use later in the week. When you cook more than you or your family will eat at one meal, you can divide, label, and freeze it. Or try these ideas:

- Beef, pork or chicken stew: create a potpie. Or shred leftover meat or chicken into burritos or beef hash.
- Rice and pastas: add leftover meat and fresh, frozen or canned vegetables to make a baked casserole, or make fried rice.
- Veggies: add to eggs to make omelets, frittata or quiche. Make lunch sandwiches out of leftover pork, beef or chicken.

Check out the website www.cheapcooking.com for leftover recipe tips, smart purchasing and food storage strategies.

A few helpful rules:

Food Safety Tip: Heat leftovers to 165° F for maximum safety.

Don't just throw it into the microwave to heat. Though it may be convenient, the microwave heats food unevenly and often makes crisp food soggy and moist foods dry. Here are some suggestions on the best way to reheat some foods.

Pizza: Place on a baking sheet and put in a preheated 400° oven/toaster oven for 4-5 minutes, OR place 1-2 slices in a skillet (cast-iron preferable), set over low heat, and warm until the bottoms have crisped up slightly and cheese has re-melted.

Chili, Soup and Braises: The meat and vegetables in these dishes absorb liquid as the leftovers sit. To achieve the proper consistency, heat them slowly in a large sauce pan with up to a cup of low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock or water. Stir constantly to ensure even heating. These types of dishes also tend to heat up fairly well in the microwave.

Burgers and chicken sandwiches: Preheat oven to 350°F. Place patties and chicken on a baking sheet and heat in the oven for 5-6 minutes, until the outside is hot to the touch. Toast a new bun and add fresh lettuce, tomato and condiments.

Pasta and noodle dishes: Noodles act like sponges, soaking up moisture from their sauce. Ideally, if you have leftover noodles and sauce— store them separately. Heat a nonstick skillet with some olive oil. Add the pasta and ¼ cup of chicken stock or water per serving. Cook until the noodles are hot and the sauce is bubbling, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Steak, pork chops and roasted chicken: Sauté in a skillet in a thin layer of olive or canola oil. Preheat oven to 350°. Heat a thin film of oil in a cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Add the meat and cook until a nice crust has been reestablished on one side — about 2-3 minutes. Flip and place the whole skillet in oven for 5-10 minutes, depending on thickness of slices.

Secret weapon: chicken (or vegetable) stock. Keep low-sodium bouillon paste on hand in the fridge or freeze homemade stock in ½ cup portions. Reheating foods can leave foods dry. Splash stock on top of pasta, meats or vegetables, and the moisture will be reabsorbed by the food and bring flavor back into the dish.

Source: *Cook This, Not That* by David Zinczenko and Matt Goulding

Good Timing

Though it's easy to let leftovers sit in the fridge for weeks, for your safety it's important to eat or toss them before they go bad. Label and date everything before you put it in the fridge or freezer. If food looks, smells, or tastes weird, you should throw it out. Check the website fsis.usda.gov for food safety and storage guidelines.

Freezer Tips

Keep a piece of paper or a whiteboard on the door to keep track of what is in your fridge and freezer. To prevent freezer burn, double-wrap food in freezer-specific bags, and squeeze out as much air as possible before storing, or use tight fitting lids on plastic containers. Freezer burn doesn't mean food is unsafe, but texture and taste probably won't be as good.

See next page for some recipe ideas

Plan two meals from a large piece of meat

Prepare a beef pot roast with 3-4 lb chuck roast, potatoes, onions, garlic, and carrots according to your favorite recipe. Immediately after the meal, remove bone and fat from leftover meat and cut into bite-sized pieces. Refrigerate and use in 3 days or label, date, and freeze in sealed containers or zip-lock freezer bags; use within 2 to 3 months. You could also use leftover pot roast to make a beef and vegetable soup by adding 2 cups diced beef to 4 cups water, ½ cup of uncooked macaroni or noodles, 1 can of tomato soup (10½ oz) or a 16 oz can of tomatoes, 2 cups of mixed vegetables (cooked or frozen). Bring to a boil over medium heat, reduce heat and simmer until pasta is done.

Fix a big pot of chili

(Serves 10)

230 calories and 7 gm fat per serving

½ c onion, chopped
1 lb lean ground beef, turkey, or chicken
1 to 2 Tbsp chili powder (to taste)
½ tsp ground black pepper
16 oz can (2 c) tomatoes

2 (8 oz) cans tomato sauce
2 (15 oz) cans kidney beans, undrained (look for brands with lower sodium)

Brown ground meat and onion in large frying pan. Drain fat. Place in large soup pot or kettle. Add remaining ingredients and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until very hot. Place extra chili in small, shallow containers and refrigerate right away to use in a day or two. This tastes even better the next day after the flavors have had a chance to blend together.

NOW YOU CAN USE LEFTOVER CHILI TO MAKE ONE OF THE 3 RECIPES BELOW:

Chili Macaroni

(Serves 5)

315 calories and 9 gm fat per serving

4 c prepared chili (about half of recipe above)
2 c cooked macaroni
½ c shredded cheddar, Colby or Mexican blend cheese

Heat chili and macaroni together in skillet over medium heat until hot. Sprinkle with cheese, serve.

Stuffed Baked Potatoes

348 calories and 5 gm fat per stuffed potato

Prepared chili (about ½ cup)
Baked potatoes
Other toppings, you choose: chopped onion, shredded cheese, chopped cooked broccoli, steamed spinach or kale or other vegetables

Prepare one potato for each person. Heat chili until hot. Cut opening in the top of the potatoes and top each with about ½ cup chili and other toppings you choose.

Mini Pizzas

170 calories and 5 gm fat per mini pizza

English muffins or hamburger buns, halves
Prepared chili
Mozzarella cheese, shredded or sliced

Spread each half muffin or bun with ¼ cup chili. Top with cheese. Microwave on high for 15 to 20 seconds, until cheese is melted, or broil in oven until hot.