



From the Food Bank Kitchen

Making the Most of Your Microwave

Microwaves are one of the easiest cooking tools to use. They're fast, convenient, and energy-efficient. You can zap up a meal in minutes. Microwaves, however, can do much more than just heat frozen dinners or reheat leftovers. Almost any food can be cooked in a microwave. One can prepare affordable and healthy meals with access to a microwave and a refrigerator; there is no need for a stove or oven to make a wide variety of tasty dishes.

Microwaving Tips

Containers: Use only glass, ceramic or plastic containers that have been labeled "microwave-safe." Never use metal containers, aluminum foil, Styrofoam™ takeout boxes, or re-use plastic trays from microwave meals after initial use.

Power Settings: Some recipe instructions use the terms "medium" or "high" heat. These are for microwaves with variable wattages. If your microwave does not have power settings, you will need to know the wattage of your oven. Check for a label on the door or back wall of the oven that lists the wattage. Tender foods with a lot of moisture, like ground beef, poultry, vegetables, and fruits are best cooked on high. Eggs, cheese and solid cuts of meat are best cooked on reduced power. Cook large cuts of meat on medium for longer periods of time.

Cooking Temperatures: Using a food-grade thermometer is recommended to make sure foods have reached safe temperatures. Place the thermometer in the thickest part of the food, not touching the container. The following guidelines are helpful to check for doneness: Chicken or Turkey—165°F; Ground Beef or Pork—160°F; Eggs—160°F; Beef or Pork chops, steaks or roasts—145°F; Fish—145°F. **LEFTOVERS:** Leftovers and carry-out foods should be reheated to an internal temperature of 165°F or above to destroy bacteria. If your leftovers have been frozen and you'd like to eat only a portion of them: thaw the leftovers in the fridge, remove only the portion you'd like to eat, and reheat to 165°F. For more info, check out homefoodsafety.org.

Covering and Turning: Arrange food evenly in container or on dish. Cover with plastic wrap for steaming. Cover with a paper towel for dry cooking. Covering food while cooking will keep juices and sauces from splashing and help foods retain their moisture and heat more evenly. If using a container, loosen lid to let steam escape while cooking. Use plastic wrap for steaming and a paper towel for dry cooking. Turn foods halfway through cooking times, even if there is a turntable to help foods cook evenly. Soups and stews should be stirred once or twice during cooking to ensure even heating, and should be brought to a gentle boil when being heated.

Defrosting and Reheating: Frozen foods thaw safest in the fridge, but when time is limited, use the microwave's defrost setting (or 30% power option). Follow directions on the package for suggested defrost time. Don't heat leftovers in plastic storage bags or plastic wrap. The cooked food can get hot enough to melt the plastic and chemicals can get into your food. Complete cooking immediately after defrosting foods. Do NOT refreeze thawed meat.

Standing Time: Keep foods in the microwave for 2 to 3 minutes after the cooking time has completed to allow them to "stand." Some foods continue to rise in temperature even when the power is off, and heat will continue to distribute.

NOTE: Bacteria grow well between 40°F and 140°F. Hot foods should be quickly refrigerated — within 2 hours of cooking — to minimize the time these foods are held within the danger zone. Divide large amounts of food into shallow containers to cool more quickly. Throw away all perishable foods that have been left at room temperature for more than two hours.

Maple Mashed Sweet Potato

Makes 2 servings

Source: USDA SNAP-Ed Connection

- 2 sweet potatoes
- 2 Tbsp plain fat-free or low-fat yogurt
- 1 Tbsp orange juice
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup (optional: substitute 1 Tbsp brown sugar)

Nutrition Facts: Calories 150, Fat 0 gm, Saturated Fat 0 gm, Sodium 80 mg, Carbohydrate 35 gm, Fiber 4 gm, Sugars 13 gm, Protein 3 gm

Directions: Poke the sweet potato skins with a fork 3-4 times. Microwave on high for 4 to 5 minutes, or until soft and easily pierced with a knife. Scoop out the pulp into a medium bowl. Mash the pulp and stir in the yogurt, maple syrup and orange juice. Transfer to a microwave-safe serving bowl and microwave on high for 1 to 2 minutes to heat through.

[See reverse for more easy microwave recipes](#)

Bean Quesadilla

Source: [USDA SNAP-Ed Connection](#)

Makes 4 servings

1 (15 oz) can beans (any variety*), drained and rinsed
4 eight-inch tortillas (whole wheat preferred)
¾ cup low fat shredded cheese
Optional Toppings: salsa, cilantro, sour cream

Nutrition Facts: Calories 250, Fat 5 gm, Saturated Fat 2 gm,
Sodium 460 mg, Carbohydrate 37 gm, Fiber 8 gm,
Protein 15 gm

* Black or pinto beans work best

Directions: Spoon a quarter of the beans onto one half of each of the tortillas. Top the beans with the shredded cheese and fold the tortilla in half. Microwave each tortilla on high for 1½ minutes, or until the cheese melts. Slice into wedges and add toppings as desired. *Mix it Up!* - If you don't like beans, there are many other fillings that can be used in a quesadilla. Other ideas for excellent fillings are tuna, grilled chicken, pulled pork, steak strips, or cooked vegetables. Be creative!

Baked Chicken Nuggets

Source: [USDA SNAP-Ed Connection](#)

Makes 4 servings

1 lb boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts
1 c cornflake cereal
½ tsp oregano
¼ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp onion powder
1 tsp paprika

¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper

Nutrition Facts: Calories 200, Fat 8 gm, Saturated Fat 3 gm,
Sodium 270 mg, Carbohydrate 7 gm, Fiber 1 gm,
Protein 22 gm

Directions: Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces. Place cornflakes in plastic bag and crush by using bottom of a bowl or cup. (Bread crumbs can be substituted, but nuggets will not be as crispy). Add remaining ingredients to crushed cornflakes. Close bag tightly and shake until blended. Add a few chicken pieces at a time to crumb mixture in the bag. Shake to coat evenly. Lightly grease a glass baking dish or plate. Place chicken pieces on dish so they are not touching. Cover with paper towel and cook on high. Rotate chicken every 2 to 3 minutes. Cook until tender and meat is white with little to no pink, about 5-7 minutes.

Cheesy Rice Casserole

Adapted from ifood.tv/recipe

Makes 4 servings

1 c white rice (uncooked)
2 c water
8 oz cheddar cheese
½ tsp garlic powder
½ c low fat milk
2 Tbsp parmesan cheese
2 Tbsp almonds (optional)

1½ c canned green beans (can substitute another canned or frozen vegetable if desired)
¼ tsp black pepper
½ tsp salt

Nutrition Facts: Calories 320, Fat 7 gm, Sodium 410 mg,
Carbohydrate 43 gm, Fiber 3 gm, Protein 21 gm

Directions: In a microwavable glass bowl, combine the water, rice, cheddar and grated parmesan cheeses, garlic powder and milk. Mix well. Cook covered on medium-high for 15–20 minutes until most of the liquid is absorbed. Stir the dish every 5 minutes. Add the vegetables and stir. Let the dish sit covered, for 5 minutes for remaining liquid to be absorbed. Top with almonds if desired. Substitute any canned vegetable such as carrots, corn, peas or mixed veggies for the green beans. If the vegetables have salt added, rinse with water in a colander to lower sodium. To add protein and make the meal more filling, add a can of chicken, tuna, salmon, beans, or any leftover cooked meat or chicken before cooking for the final 5 minutes.

BONUS RECIPE: CRISPY MICROWAVE KALE CHIPS

Source: npr.org/blogs/thesalt

Directions: Remove stems from about ½ bunch of kale. Tear leaves into 2-inch pieces; wash and thoroughly dry, then toss well with 1 Tbsp oil in large bowl. Spread in a single layer on a large microwave-safe plate and season as desired (kosher salt and/or garlic powder work well). Microwave for 2-3 minutes. If leaves are crispy, transfer to serving bowl. If not, continue to microwave in 30-second increments until crispy. Serve and enjoy! Store any leftover chips in an airtight container.