

Eating Well

By Michele Morris, BACKPACKER Northeast Editor, February 2001

With simple planning, you can turn your bare-bones backcountry meals into satisfying, energy-boosting successes.

"Six months after our 100-Mile Wilderness trip, we still had extra food that we had no desire to eat on the trail or at home," says Jamie. Thanks to their fire-drill packing habits and belief that freeze-dried is too expensive, Jamie and Joe would grab what they thought to be the cheapest, easiest fare: instant noodles, oatmeal, cans of Chef Boyardee, MRE's (meals ready to eat), and other minimalist food that shortchanged their gourmet appetites.

Expert Advice

Dorcas S. Miller, frequent Backpacker contributor and author of *Backcountry Cooking: From Pack to Plate In 10 Minutes*.

"Jamie and Joe eat just to survive," says Miller. "If they put in a little time before the trip, they can have at-home meals with little fuss in the backcountry." While eating well requires more shopping, repackaging, and measuring at home, the rewards-stoking your engine to go the extra miles, and actually enjoying your food—more than pay off on the trail.

Spend a little extra time and money on food you really enjoy—spicy dinners, trail mix, roasted almonds, dried cherries, your favorite chocolate, whatever will boost your spirits. Plan a wide variety. Raisins, nuts, and M&M's might be a great snack for a weekend trip, but on longer outings, your taste buds need a break. "Include variety in texture as well as taste," advises Miller. Pack crunchy foods—nuts, pretzels, crackers, sesame sticks, corn nuts, malt balls—and chewy things—dried fruit, licorice, fruit bars, cheese. She recommends chocolate bars, hard candies, hearts at Valentine's Day, and candy corn at Halloween for something different.

Think lightweight. Jamie and Joe thought they were saving ounces and dollars by carrying MRE's, but they weren't. Dehydrated or freeze-dried food is far more efficient. Some freeze-dried foods can be costly, so shop around for what fits your budget. Supermarkets offer a smorgasbord of inexpensive dehydrated foods like couscous, instant grits and rice, Chinese noodles, instant hash browns and refried beans, dehydrated chili, as well as good old noodles with sauce.

Dry your own. It's easier than you think (see upcoming *Moveable Feast* articles on food drying), and you'll be able to reproduce mouthwatering home-cooked meals on the trail.

End Result

"This is so much better than what we ate before," says Joe. At lunch and for snacks, they now linger over bags of dehydrated bananas, pears, and apples. At night, the couple marvels at their easy-to-prepare and flavorful cashew-ginger chicken with rice, and chili dinners. "Dorcas's advice about treating yourself to good food is key; it's made a big difference in our trips and our enjoyment," says Joe.

Learn more solutions to common backpacking problems: finding the time, planning a trip, and packing right. See our related article, [You Can Teach Old Dogs New Tricks](#)

Recipes

Dinner Entree

Cashew-Ginger Chicken and Rice

Recipe Ingredients

2/3 Cup raw cashews

1-1/4 Cups freeze-dried corn
3 Tablespoons chopped dehydrated onion
1-1/2 Cups instant brown rice
6 thinly sliced dried mushrooms
1 Ounce Coconut Ginger soup mix
5 Ounces canned chicken in water

Serves: 2

At Home: Spread nuts on a cookie sheet and toast at 300F for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven, let cool, then store in a zipper-lock plastic bag. Combine corn, onion, rice, and mushrooms, plus seasoning packet, in a second zipper-lock plastic bag.

In Camp: Place bagged corn mixture and chicken in a pot and cover with water; mix well. Bring to a boil; simmer 5 minutes (adding more water as needed) or until done. Garnish with nuts.

Calories: 884
Carbohydrates: 128
Fat: 24.896
Protein: 33.863
Saturated Fat: 5.701

Dinner Entree

Dorcas's Trail Chili

Recipe Ingredients

22-1/2 Ounces kidney beans
1 box dehydrated vegetarian chili mix
1 Ounce dry-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
1 Dash hot sauce (to taste)
2 Ounces Cheddar cheese
30 corn chips

Serves: 2

At Home: Drain and rinse kidney beans, then dry in dehydrator or oven. Put into a zipper-lock plastic bag with chili mix and tomatoes.

In Camp: Pour contents of plastic bag in pot with 7 cups water. Stir well. Let stand 15 minutes to allow ingredients to rehydrate (add water if necessary; ingredients shouldn't be above waterline). Bring to a boil and simmer about 5 minutes, until ingredients are completely hydrated, stirring continuously to prevent sticking. Mix 1 ounce cheese into each serving and sprinkle with half of the corn chips.

Calories: 429
Carbohydrates: 58.2
Cholesterol: 20
Dietary Fiber: 13.6
Fiber: 15.3
Protein: 21.8
Saturated Fat: 5
Sodium: 911
Total Fat: 13.7

Breakfast Entree

Lemon-Raisin Breakfast Bars

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Cups raisins
- 14 Ounces sweetened condensed milk
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 Tablespoon lemon rind
- 1 Cup butter
- 1-1/3 Cups brown sugar
- 1-1/2 Teaspoons vanilla
- 1 Cup flour
- 1/2 Teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 Teaspoon salt
- 1-1/2 Cups rolled oats
- 1 Cup chopped walnuts

Serves: 6 (2 bars per serving)

At Home: In a saucepan, combine raisins, milk, lemon juice, and lemon rind. Heat and stir until bubbling, then remove from heat to cool slightly. In a bowl, beat together butter, brown sugar, and vanilla to make a batter. Stir in flour, baking soda, and salt. Next add oats and walnuts. Press all but 2 cups of the batter into a greased 13 x 9-inch pan. Spread raisin mixture on top of batter to within 1/2 inch of the edges. Sprinkle with dollops of reserved batter; press lightly. Bake at 350F for 25 to 30 minutes, or until golden brown. Allow to cool. Then slice into 12 bars and package 2 bars per zipper-lock plastic bag.

Calories: 1165
Carbohydrates: 166
Cholesterol: 113
Dietary Fiber: 5
Fiber: 6.8
Protein: 17.1
Saturated Fat: 25.4
Sodium: 696
Total Fat: 52.5

Lunch Entree

Light and Lively

Recipe Ingredients

- 1-1/2 Ounces pepperoni
- 1/2 Cup Goldfish crackers
- 4 dried pear halves
- 2 pieces hard candy
- 4 malted milk balls
- 3 slices French bread
- 1 Ounce Cheddar cheese
- 1/2 bell pepper
- 2 Tablespoons nut butter

Serves: 1

Here's a lunch that provides lots of variety. If you're a big person who gets hungry fast, you may want to increase the amounts.

Calories: 1483
Carbohydrates: 220
Cholesterol: 77.1
Dietary Fiber: 20.7
Fiber: 31.7
Protein: 38.7
Saturated Fat: 17.4
Sodium: 1808
Total Fat: 57.5

Dessert

Mincemeat Pudding

Recipe Ingredients

6 Ounces condensed mincemeat
1/2 Cup chopped walnuts

Serves: 2

In Camp: Crumble equal portions of mincemeat into 2 insulated cups or bowls. Add 1/3 cup boiling water to each. Cover and let stand for 10 minutes. Stir equal portions of walnuts into each cup before eating.

Calories: 1067
Carbohydrates: 224
Cholesterol: 0
Dietary Fiber: 7.5
Fiber: 8.9
Protein: 4.3
Saturated Fat: 1.7
Sodium: 1461
Total Fat: 19.4

Dessert

S'mores in a Bag

Recipe Ingredients

1/2 Cup crumbled graham crackers (about 1-1/2 crackers)
1/4 Cup chocolate chips
1/4 Cup chopped walnuts, toasted

Serves: 2

At Home: Combine all ingredients and divide evenly into two small oven roasting bags.

In Camp: Squeeze as much air from the bags as possible. Make sure the bags are securely closed and submerge them in hot water until the chocolate has melted. Remove the bags from the water and spoon the contents into your mouth.

Calories: 215
Carbohydrates: 21.5
Cholesterol: .05
Dietary Fiber: .9
Fiber: 1.8
Protein: 3.5
Saturated Fat: .9
Sodium: 40.8
Total Fat: 14.2

Lunch Entree

Traditional Filling Fare

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 flour tortillas, any flavor
- 1/2 Cup instant hummus
- 2 Ounces Cheddar cheese
- 4 Ounces pretzels
- 5 dried peach halves
- 2 medium-size strips jerky
- 4 fig bars
- 1/4 Cup gorp
- 2 Ounces yogurt-covered raisins

Serves: 1

Super-hungry people may want to increase the amounts.

Calories: 3003
Carbohydrates: 473
Cholesterol: 104
Dietary Fiber: 27.5
Fiber: 36
Protein: 68.4
Saturated Fat: 64.8
Sodium: 3575
Total Fat: 108