

## Backpacking Food

Cooper Wright  
George Washington District Venture Scout Coordinator

Food is an important item to consider when planning for any type of camping trip. It becomes even more important when planning a backpacking trip since you must carry everything with you. When backpacking, weight and time become the critical factors. They will impact your menu planning and meal preparation.

The first factor to consider is weight. You can't carry a lot of liquids or bulky prepared meals because your pack will quickly become too heavy to carry for long distances. Even with dehydrated food, plan on carrying 1 to 1-1/2 pounds of food per person per day. Remember, your pack has got to carry your own personal gear and still have room for food and your share of crew gear. Unless you are hiking alone, it is impractical to plan individual meals. Crews should develop their own menu based on the likes and dislikes of the crew members. By crew planning and packing, you share the weight and bulk of the food, thus making for lighter and less cumbersome packs. Crew planning also insures that unnecessary food is not bought and each hiker has enough to eat.

Food should be premeasured and placed in Ziploc plastic bags so only what is needed is brought on the trail/ Any cooking instructions should be written on a piece of paper and placed inside the Ziploc bag with the food. When you are out on the trail, it is difficult to remember whether to add one or two cups of water to your instant pudding! Also plan to mark your drinking cup with liquid measurements. DO NOT GUESS! All unnecessary packaging materials should be discarded since packaging adds extra weight and bulk. All ingredients for a single meal should be placed in large Ziploc bags and marked with the meal and day (e.g., "Breakfast – Day Two"), making it easy to find when you arrive in camp and get ready to cook.

The second factor is time. If you have lots of time in the morning, you can prepare a substantial breakfast such as eggs, hash browns, or pancakes. Sometimes on long hikes, you will only have time to boil water, in which the best items will be instant oatmeal and hot chocolate. If time is really crucial, you may have time enough for a cold breakfast such as Pop Tarts or Kudo Bars. Before you begin your food planning, know how much time you will have for meals. This way, you won't buy the wrong type of food.

## Meal Planning

### Breakfast

Breakfast meals can be planned for three different categories: hot, hot water, and cold meals. As discussed earlier, the type of meal depends on the amount of time you have in the morning before you hit the trail.

#### Hot Breakfast

Hot breakfasts are excellent to start the day when you do not have to make any deadlines.

**Powdered eggs versus fresh:** powdered eggs weigh less and require no refrigeration. However, they are sometimes difficult to prepare and don't taste like fresh eggs. Fresh eggs weigh more and are easier to prepare. Fresh eggs can be sealed to require no refrigeration by boiling them in water for FIVE SECONDS (caution – do not over boil). Fresh eggs can also present an obvious problem of packaging. A plastic egg carrier is a good solution, but only medium size eggs will fit. If you bring real eggs, bring fresh ingredients to jazz up your morning with trail omelets.

**Dehydrated hash browns versus fresh:** fresh potatoes taste great, but require lots of time for preparation and cooking. They also weigh three times more than dehydrated. Dehydrated are light and can be prepared quickly. Dehydrated appear to be the best and they do not sacrifice taste.

**Pancakes:** pancakes are good and should be considered when you have lots of time. Make sure you buy a mix requiring only the addition of water. If you plan for pancakes, don't forget the syrup. You don't have to bring a huge bottle with you. A two- or four-ounce plastic bottle, available at most camping outlets, is sufficient.

To cook these meals, a ten-inch diameter Teflon® coated skillet and a plastic spatula are a MUST. The typical Scout aluminum cook set fry pan is difficult to cook in and impossible to clean up afterwards.

#### Hot Water Only

This is a good option when you do not have lots of time for preparation and clean up.

**Instant Oatmeal:** This appears to be the best bet for most backpacking breakfast meals. Oatmeal is light, easy to prepare, and economical. You can add variety to the taste by obtaining several different flavors.

**Hot chocolate or hot Tang:** both are easy to fix, but should only be used as hot supplements.

## **Cold Breakfast**

Cold breakfasts should only be used when time is absolutely critical. The following cold breakfast items make excellent supplements to either the hot or hot water breakfasts. Caution should be taken to make sure that you do not overload your menu with these items.

- Pop Tarts
- Granola bars or breakfast bars
- Fruit roll-ups or Fun Fruits
- Cold Tang or breakfast drink (be sure to add dry milk ahead of time to breakfast drinks)
- Granola or Grape Nuts with instant milk

## **Lunches**

Lunches will always be cold meals, unless exceptional weather conditions dictate the need for hot food. Some hikers enjoy eating small lunches throughout the day as they walk. Others prefer to stop for a lunch break during midday. The choice depends on the style of the crew and the number of miles covered each day.

### **Cold Lunches**

This is the normal fare for the backpacker because of time constraints and the bother of unpacking the crew's cooking kit and stove. Lunches should be easy to prepare and simple to eat. This allows the hiker to either take a prolonged lunch break or eat while he is walking.

- Spreadables: ham, tuna, chicken, turkey or tuna
- Crackers: Ritz, melba toast, Triscuits (any hard cracker – hard to break)
- Peanut butter, honey, jelly and cheese spread in food tubes
- Beef sticks or jerky
- Hard cheeses
- Granola bars or Kudo bars
- Fruit roll-ups or Fun Fruits
- Candy bars
- GORP (good old raisins and peanuts)
- Gatorade or Kool-Aid

### **Hot Lunches**

If you are hiking in cold weather, a hot lunch provides a good pick me up to a tired and cold hiker. Cup of Noodles or Top Ramen make excellent meals, but Cup of Noodles tend to be a bit bulky and sometimes difficult to fit in your pack without damaging the cup. Cup of Noodles can be repackaged into plastic bags and dumped into a cup and water added. Cup of Soup, including some of the gourmet soups are also great with croutons or crackers.

## Dinner

Dinner meals are always hot and are the major meal of the day. They become the social event of the day when the crew gathers to discuss the day's activities. Dinners are also the best meal to experiment with new ideas and recipes. The best meals tend to be the simplest and easiest to prepare. After you get a little experience, you might want to try different things and develop your own favorite recipes.

**Meat:** A small (3 oz. per person) can of meat serves as the basis for your meal. This can be tuna, chicken, turkey, ham, beef, shrimp or crab.

**Noodles or rice:** This provides the bulk of the dinner meal. There are several different prepared rice or noodle meals available at the supermarket (Lipton are great). Be sure to read the instructions BEFORE you go out for additional ingredients (e.g., butter or milk) that you must bring along to add to the packaged prepared dinners. Plan so that each hiker receives one cup of prepared food. Most packaged rice or noodle dinners will only feed two hungry hikers. Carbohydrates are important for keeping the energy level up.

**Dessert:** Instant puddings or instant cheesecakes are the best. Dry milk can be added to the mix before leaving home. Pudding or cheesecake should be the first item prepared for your dinner so they can sit and firm up while you are cooking.

Make sure that you follow cooking instructions thoroughly. You don't want to spoil the best meal of the day by soupy puddings or a dinner that is undercooked. You can spice up your meals by bringing along a collection of spices. I usually carry salt, pepper, basil, oregano, allspice and cinnamon. Don't forget to bring a little cooking oil in a plastic bottle. This will make meal preparation and clean up a lot easier. Other items that can be added to your supper meal to jazz up the taste are dehydrated soups, packaged potato mixes and Stove Top stuffing (you will tire or noodles or rice every time).

## Suggested Menu for a Three-Day Trip

### Friday evening

- Hot tea or cocoa
- Cheese and crackers

### Saturday morning

- Omelet with dried onions, cheese and bacon bits
- Dehydrated hash brown potatoes
- Hot or cold Tang
- Cocoa

### Saturday lunch

- Chicken spreadables
- Ritz crackers
- Kudo Bar or candy bar
- Gatorade or Kool-Ade

### Saturday snacks

- Small bag of GORP (good old raisins and peanuts)
- Fruit Rollups or Fun Fruits
- Beef jerky

### Saturday dinner

- Tuna
- Lipton noodles dinner (with mushroom sauce)
- Crackers with cheese
- Banana instant pudding with dried milk added
- Hot chocolate or tea

### Sunday breakfast

- Instant oatmeal (any flavor), with creamer added
- Granola bars or Kudo Bars
- Hot chocolate
- Hot or cold Tang

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### Food Ideas for Backpacking

Soup	Corn	Apple juice
Spaghetti and meat balls	Green beans	Capri Sun
Spaghetti-Os	Peas	Kool-Ade
Ravioli	Apple sauce	Tang
Beef-A-Roni	Pears	Hot tea
Dinty Moore beef stew	Mixed fruit cup	Hot cocoa
Hormel canned chili	Fruit cocktail	
Spam	Peaches	
Corned beef hash	Raisins	
Roast beef hash	Peanut butter and honey or jelly	
Spreadables	Granola bars	
Canned chicken	Pop Tarts	
Canned turkey	Oatmeal	
Canned tuna	Grits	
Vienna sausage	Eggs (if packed well)	
Beef jerky	Pudding	
Deviled ham	Cookies	
Sardines	Apples	
Noodles and sauce	Carrots	
Macaroni and cheese	Celery	
Top Raman	Bread	
Kraft egg noodles and chicken dinner	Crackers	
Pork and beans		
Beanee-Weenee		