

Troop 542 Backpacking Menu Resource Packet

How Much Food Should You Pack?

When pondering how much or little to carry, err on the side of taking a little more. One of the Ten Essentials for an overnight trip, in fact, is a supply of extra food. A reasonable goal is 1.5 to 2.5 lbs. of food (or 2,500 to 4,500 calories) per person per day depending on your size, weight and exertion level.

On the other hand, don't overdo it. A common blunder is to pack too much food, forcing you to lug unwanted bulk and weight. Experience will teach you what amount of food works for you.

Meal Planning Considerations

Taste: Eat what you like. Don't try to convert your taste buds to new types of food deep in the backcountry.

Nutrition: It's fine to tear into a candy bar during a trip, but for the long haul you want to rely on complex carbohydrates and proteins. Intelligent quick snacks such as nuts and dried fruits provide more stable energy for your muscles than that candy bar.

Weight and bulk: Stick to lightweight and low-bulk backpacking food as much as possible. Consider repackaging foods into resealable plastic baggies to minimize bulk and garbage. Be sure to clearly label the baggies and include cooking instructions.

Ease of preparation: Unless you are an experienced camp chef, keep things simple.

Availability of water: This can vary greatly depending on where you're going and can influence what backpacking food you choose to bring.

Fuel: Check the cook time for foods such as pasta, potatoes, rice, etc. Fast cooking options are available for most of these foods (such as "Minute Rice", etc).

Meal Options

Fresh foods: Refrigeration is one of those luxuries you leave behind at the trailhead. Most fresh foods are good for one day inside your pack, maybe two. Carrots usually last longer, and weather can play a part in this.

Dry foods (pasta, noodles, instant rice, soup mixes, drink mixes) are light, take up minimal volume inside a pack and offer you some decent taste alternatives.

Freeze-dried/dehydrated foods are super convenient. They are quick to prepare and light-weight.

Canned foods have a place in your pack only if the trip is short and your hunger for familiar food is high. Tuna or other canned meat products can be a nice toss-in item for a pot of rice, for instance. But skip foods packaged in traditional 15-ounce (or larger) cans or bottles. The weight and bulk just aren't worth it.

Nuts!! These have needed calories! Salted, roasted, whatever. Nuts are a tasty way to pack in dense calories, protein and healthy fats and oils. There are countless varieties of nuts as well - peanuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, almonds, pecans, pistachios, walnuts and pumpkin seeds to name a few. Be sure to consider allergies for those you are serving.

Tortillas! Bread can be too bulky and fluffy for backpacking. Tortillas are compact and can take a beating. Great for wraps - Peanut Butter and M&Ms, Meat and Cheese, Hummus and Tuna. Mmmmmmm.

Spices can boost the appeal of backpacking food. Consider bringing pepper, garlic powder or salt, cayenne pepper, crushed red pepper, cinnamon or whatever else is essential to your home kitchen.

Flavored beverages with powdered drink mixes offer a nice mid-trip treat.

Backpacking Meal Ideas

Breakfast

Backpacking breakfasts can be fast and basic (an energy bar, granola, dried fruit, etc), or can be full hot meals (powdered eggs, oatmeal, etc).

Popular choices: Instant hot cereals, dehydrated eggs, breakfast bars, granola, dry cereal, instant tea, powdered milk, fresh fruit, dried fruits.

Lunch

Rather than take a prolonged break for a midday meal (involving unpacking, preparation, cleanup and repacking), a better strategy is to have a meal that can be spread out over time (stop and eat, then munch while hiking).

Popular choices: Jerky, crackers with meat package (tuna, chicken, ham, spam), cheese (not fresh), dried fruit, fig bars, bagels (best for shorter trips), energy bars and nuts.

Dinner

This is your reward for a day of exertion. Backcountry gourmets need not make things complicated. Sometimes a simple spice added to a meal can make a difference. Many backpackers, though, opt for the just-add-boiling-water convenience of prepackaged freeze-dried or dehydrated meals, or simple dishes such as pasta.

Popular choices: Packaged meals, pasta, instant rice (such as Knorr Sides), ramen noodles, instant soups and sauces, instant stuffing (add a package of cooked chicken to complete the meal), instant potatoes and tuna. Consider bringing along some favorite spices (onion and garlic powder, basil, oregano).

Snacks

These should be edible while hiking. Although a bag of chips may sound “snacky” at home, these do nothing for a backpacker’s nutrition. Consider snack foods designed for high-energy and sports replenishment.

Popular choices: Fruit/gummy chews (Honey Stingers, energy chews), granola or bars, nuts, chocolate such as M&M’s (dark chocolate will not melt as easily), anything with peanut butter (high in protein and fatty essential oils), energy bars (Clif, Lara, ProBar, PowerBar, etc).