

Save Time with Make-ahead Freezer Meals



“What’s for dinner?” Have you ever heard that question? To have a ready-to-go answer, consider making some extra casseroles and freezing them for later.

Yes, frozen dinners are available in grocery stores, but they can be fairly high in fat and salt. They often are more expensive than food you prepare at home. Try these tips to make your own freezer meals:

- Choose your favorite recipes, but check the ingredients in the recipes.
 - Entrees containing sour cream, mayonnaise and raw vegetables do not freeze well.
- Undercook starchy ingredients, such as pasta, rice and potatoes, because the casserole will be baked later and could become overcooked.
- Go easy on added seasonings, such as pepper, because they can become stronger during frozen storage.
- Leave casserole toppings, such as breadcrumbs, off the casseroles so they don’t become soggy.
- Package in meal-sized portions whether you are cooking for an individual, couple or family.
- Protect your food from freezer burn, which can lower the quality of the food. Wrap securely with heavy-duty aluminum foil or freezer paper, or use freezer containers.
- Label the freezer container with the date and name of the casserole. Include baking time and temperature on the label.
- Be sure your freezer temperature is zero degrees Fahrenheit or lower.
- For best quality, enjoy your homemade casseroles within three months.
- Bake frozen casseroles “as is” or thaw them overnight in your refrigerator.
 - For frozen, fully cooked casseroles, bake at 400 degrees for the maximum time stated in the recipe.
 - For thawed, fully cooked casseroles, bake at the temperature directed in the recipe, but add about 15 minutes to the baking time.
 - Measure the temperature with a food thermometer. The internal temperature of the food should be 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/foodwise for more information.

This program is funded in part by USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more contact your county Social Services office or call 1-800-755-2716.

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I have been hearing about folic acid lately. What is it?

Nutrition educators across North Dakota are spreading the news about the benefits of folic acid. Folic acid is a B vitamin that the body needs for healthy cells and blood.

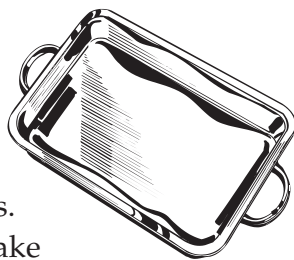
Sometimes folic acid is referred to as folate, which is the natural form of the vitamin found in foods such as leafy green vegetables, dry edible beans and citrus fruits. Folic acid is a man-made form of the B vitamin found in fortified breakfast cereals, bread, pasta and rice, and vitamin supplements.

Folic acid is needed by everyone for good health, but it's especially important for women who could become pregnant. Women who could become pregnant should get 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.

Folic acid helps form a baby's brain and spine. Women who have enough folic acid in their bodies starting at least a month before pregnancy can prevent up to 70 percent of the birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. Ask your local Extension Service office for more information or visit www.ndsu.edu/health.

I would like to make some freezer meals, such as lasagna, ahead of time, but I can't afford to buy new pans. Do you have any ideas?

You can line baking pans with a large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, leaving some overlapping foil along the edges. Place the food inside the pan, bake your entrée, then freeze. When solidly frozen, pop the entrée out of the pan, wrap and seal securely and return to the freezer. When you thaw the food, be sure to place the frozen food in a pan to prevent drips in your refrigerator.



Bean Quesadillas

- 4 (10-inch) tortillas (whole wheat or white)
- 1 (15- to 16-ounce) can chili beans
- 1 c. shredded cheese (such as Monterey Jack)
- 1 c. salsa (if desired)
- 1 c. shredded lettuce (if desired)

1. Open can of chili beans, pour onto a plate, stir and mash with a fork, if desired.
2. Place tortilla on microwavable plate.
3. Spread half of the mashed chili beans on center of tortilla.
4. Sprinkle ½ cup of cheese on top.
5. Top with second tortilla, slip off plate into a frying pan. Assemble second quesadilla.
6. Heat until cheese melts. Use pancake turner to transfer quesadillas to plates.
7. Cut each quesadilla in four pieces. Serve warm. Top with salsa and lettuce if desired.

Serves four.
Each serving has 460 calories,
16 grams (g) fat and
58 g carbohydrate.

Recipe source:
Northroest Bean Growers
(www.northroestbean.org)

MENU IDEA

Bean Quesadillas,
carrot sticks with
low-fat Ranch dip,
apple slices and
low-fat milk.

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Contact the local office of the
NDSU Extension Service
for more information
on food and nutrition or
managing your food dollar.

