

Making Freezer Meals With Lentils, Chickpeas and Split Peas



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Target Group

Adults or older youth

Time Needed

30 to 50 minutes, depending on activities

Objectives

Participants will:

- * Increase their understanding of pulses and pulse foods
- * Be able to identify at least three types of pulse foods
- * Be able to list at least two nutritional benefits of including pulses as part of a healthful diet
- * Be able to list the steps to preparing freezer meals using pulse ingredients

Preparation and Supplies

Copies of handouts

- * "On the Pulse of Healthful Eating: Making Freezer Meals With Lentils, Chickpeas and Split Peas" (FN1787)
- * Participant evaluation

Optional activities

Pulse Bingo

- * Bingo cards/instructions
- * Dry beans or slips of paper to mark spaces
- * Game available at www.ag.ndsu.edu/food/pulse-crops/teaching-materials

Prepare a Recipe

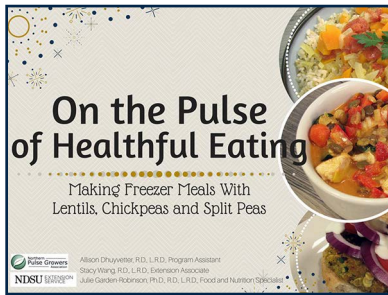
Gather supplies/ingredients and do a demonstration or have the participants help.

Share Your Experience

Ask participants to share helpful tips from their experience with freezing meals.

Taste Testing

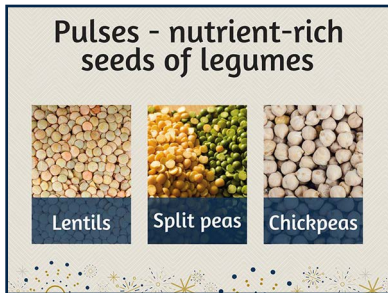
Prepare a recipe in advance for taste testing. Bring serving utensils, plates, etc.



Slide 1: Title Slide

Introduce yourself if applicable.

Welcome to this lesson on making freezer meals. You can apply these concepts to a wide variety of ingredients, but we will focus on using pulse ingredients. Today, we will talk about the nutrition of these foods and how to make freezer meals. We also will introduce some tasty recipe options.



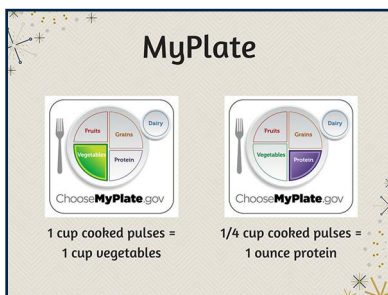
Slide 2: Pulses – Nutrient-rich Seeds of Legumes

By a show of hands, how many of you are familiar with pulses? Pulses are the nutrient-rich seeds of legumes and include chickpeas, lentils and dry split peas. They are a staple in the diets of many people living in the Mediterranean area, India, the Middle East, Africa, Australia and South America. U.S. production of pulses has been increasing since 1990.



Slide 3: Nutrition and Health

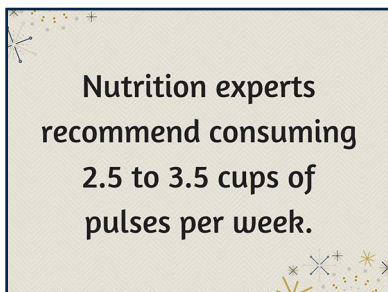
2016 was declared the International Year of Pulses to increase public awareness of the nutritional benefits of pulses. Pulses are an excellent source of fiber and folate, and a good source of protein and iron. They also are gluten-free and are a low-allergen food. Chickpeas are very low sodium and low fat, while peas and lentils are fat- and sodium-free. Additionally, lentils are an excellent source of antioxidants.



Slide 4: MyPlate

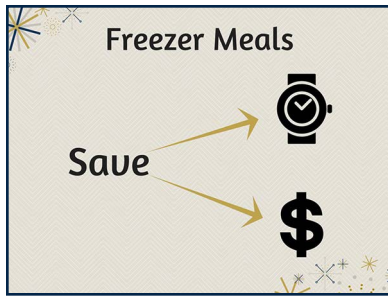
MyPlate is a food guidance system for Americans that was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. MyPlate illustrates the five food groups that are considered the building blocks of a healthful diet. The MyPlate icon, which is shown on the screen, is a familiar image: a place setting for a meal.

Because of their nutrient makeup, pulses can be counted in two different food groups: the vegetable or protein food group. One cup of cooked pulses equals 1 cup of vegetables. One-fourth cup of cooked pulses is equal to 1 ounce of protein. You can choose to count pulses as a vegetable or a protein food. Generally, those who regularly eat meat, fish or poultry would count pulses as a vegetable. Vegetarians, vegans and others who eat less protein would count pulses as a protein food.



Slide 5: Nutrition experts recommend consuming 2.5 to 3.5 cups of pulses per week.

As we learned, pulses are a good source of plant protein. Because of their nutrient-rich content, eating pulses is recommended for everyone, including those who already eat meat, fish or poultry. Research has shown that eating pulse foods regularly may reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, as well as having positive effects on blood pressure, blood glucose and weight management. For optimal health, nutrition experts recommend consuming 2.5 to 3.5 cups of pulses per week.



Slide 6: Freezer Meals

Freezer meals are the product of a process known as “freezer cooking.” You invest time up front so you can save time later. You can prepare a variety of delicious meals that will feed you or your family for two weeks to two months. Meals are prepared assembly-style, packaged, labeled and then frozen. Assembly-style processing saves you time. Instead of chopping one onion for each recipe, you might chop 10 onions at one time for use in multiple recipes. Buying ingredients in bulk may save you money. Remember to compare unit prices (price per ounce) on larger-sized food packages vs. smaller containers.

As an added bonus, when you have ready-to-cook (or reheat) meals in your freezer, you are less tempted to go out to eat. Meals eaten away from home often are more expensive and less nutritious than home-prepared meals.



Slide 7: Getting Started Steps: 1 to 3

If making freezer meals is new to you, start small and gradually increase the number of meals you prepare. Try a few meals that you know your family will eat, or try out a plan for two weeks’ worth of evening meals if you feel ready. Many freezer meal resources are available online to help you get started. The complexity and the number of recipes will determine how long preparing freezer meals will take you. As you gain more experience, you will become more efficient at preparing them. We have broken the process of preparing freezer meals into nine steps to make it easier for you to follow.

Step 1: Schedule Time

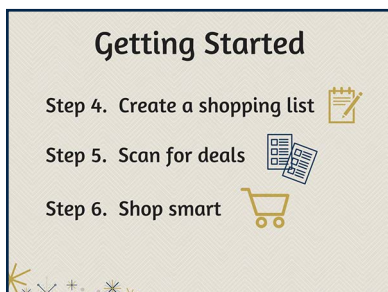
Choose the days you will be able to complete your freezer cooking session. You will need time for a partial day of shopping and several hours for preparing meals, depending on how many you choose to make.

Step 2: Choose Your Recipes

Think of your family’s favorite meals. Review other recipes you have found; compare nutrition. Decide on the entrées you are going to make and locate all of the recipes you will need.

Step 3: Create a Monthly Menu Plan

Be sure to have your family members’ schedules in front of you as you plan menus to remind you of evening events where you will be eating out. Write your entrée selections on a blank menu calendar, filling in one entrée per day, or use menu-planning software or apps.



Slide 8: Getting Started: Steps 4 to 6

Step 4: Create a Shopping List

Be sure to have all of your recipes in front of you while creating your grocery shopping list. After you have your completed list, cross off any ingredients you have on hand. Make sure to note the total amount of ingredients you will need from all recipes. Don’t forget to add freezer bags to your list. If you prefer, use menu-planning software or apps to generate a shopping list automatically.

Step 5: Scan for Deals

Read the grocery store fliers for your favorite stores. Make note of the best meat and poultry specials; protein foods tend to be the most expensive.

Step 6: Shop Smart

Using your shopping list, purchase the foods you need and store them properly prior to preparation. For example, use fresh, refrigerated meat within a couple of days of purchase. Try not to shop too far in advance or your ingredients may not be at their best when you're ready to use them.



Slide 9: Steps 7 to 9

Step 7: Make a Game Plan

Gather your recipes. Group recipes with common steps, such as browning ground beef, and chopping and sautéing onions. Plan the order in which you will prepare your recipes.

Step 8: Prepare Freezer Meals Efficiently

Using a permanent marker, label freezer bags with the name of the recipe, cooking directions and date before you start cooking. The bags are much easier to write on when they are empty. Another option is to print the recipe name, date and directions on mailing labels. Freezer containers also can be used in place of freezer bags.

Perform all chopping, slicing, crushing and grating tasks. For example, chop all of the onions and brown all of the ground beef you need at one time. If you have special appliances, such as vegetable choppers or a food processor, use them to speed up your preparation time.

Step 9: Pack and Freeze

Place food in meal-sized amounts in freezer bags or freezer containers. Many freezer meal recipes fit nicely in a 1-gallon freezer bag. If using freezer bags, freeze the bags flat for easy stacking. Once frozen, you can stack them horizontally, as you would stack books on a bookshelf, to maximize freezer space.



Slide 10: Tips for Success

Choosing freezer-friendly foods can help ensure that your freezer meals are good quality. Casseroles, soups, stews, chili and meat loaf all freeze well. Certain foods will not reheat well after being frozen. Lettuce, watermelon and tomatoes will become limp. Cooked potato chunks will become gritty. Fully cooked pasta may become mushy. Gravies and some dairy products such as cream or milk will separate when frozen, and cooked eggs may become rubbery.

Make sure your food is safe to consume by quickly cooling cooked dishes before freezing. Place food in a shallow container and refrigerate uncovered until cool. You also can place a container in a bed of ice water to cool it faster.

Tips for Success

- Label meals with name, use-by date and cooking instructions
- Freeze foods quickly (0 F)
- Thaw meals in refrigerator (40 F)

Avoid freezer-burn by using freezer-grade containers such as a freezer zip-top plastic bag. Make sure to remove as much air as possible before sealing the freezer bag. Storing food in smaller quantities allows it to freeze more quickly and gives you the ability to take out only what you need.

Slide 11: Tips for Success (continued)

Use a permanent marker to label all food that goes into the freezer so you know what it is.

Include a use-by date. Most entrees will maintain their quality for about three months from the date they were prepared. Include any preparation steps needed to cook the food. That way you won't have to search for the recipe when you are ready to cook.

Freeze foods quickly. For best quality of your frozen foods, maintain a freezer temperature of 0 F or lower. The quicker the food freezes, the better the quality will be when it thaws. When freezing, arrange the containers in a single layer so air can circulate and help the food freeze quickly. After the containers are frozen, you can stack them.

Thaw frozen food in the refrigerator at 40 F or less. Thawing foods at room temperature increases the risk of foodborne illness because bacteria grow well at room temperature. Also, when thawing food, be aware that some freezer bags are safe to microwave, while others are not. Be sure to read the information on the box of bags to see if they are safe to microwave. If you are not sure if the plastic is safe to microwave, remove the food from the plastic bag and place in a microwave-safe container.

Share Your Experience: Have you ever prepared freezer meals? Who has additional tips to share with the group from his or her experiences?

Incorporating Pulses into Freezer Meals

- Soup
- Stew
- Curry
- Casserole



Slide 12: Incorporating Pulses into Freezer Meals

Lentils, dry peas and chickpeas can be the main protein source in a freezer meal entree or can complement an animal protein such as ground beef, chicken or pork. Many freezer meal recipes pair pulses with chopped vegetables and sauces. Soups and stews are easy-to-make freezer meals. Once prepared, these entrees can be served with rice or pasta and additional vegetables or fruits to make a balanced meal.

Batch Freezing

Lentils, chickpeas and split peas freeze well and can be cooked and then frozen in single-serve or meal-size portions.



Slide 13: Batch Freezing

You can cook batches of lentils, peas or chickpeas and freeze them in single-serving or meal-size portions. Pulses that are firmer after being cooked will freeze better than those cooked to a soft texture. Be sure to remove as much moisture as possible before freezing by patting cooked pulses with a dry paper towel.

Pulses can be stored in a plastic bag in a single layer or in a glass or plastic container. A container may work better for storing dry peas because they become a puree when cooked. If stored in a glass container, they easily can be reheated in the microwave when you are ready to use them. If stored in a plastic bag, place in the refrigerator to thaw the night before you want to use them.

"Heat and Eat" Freezer Meals



Lentil Chicken Curry



Lentil and Chickpea Burgers

Slide 14: "Heat and Eat" Freezer Meals

These are two brand new NDSU Extension Service recipes. These meals are cooked entirely and frozen, and then can be reheated and eaten later. The Lentil Chicken Curry combines chicken with lentils, red curry paste, coconut milk and 4 cups of vegetables of your choice. Serve over rice or with naan (flat bread often featured in Indian cuisine).

The Lentil and Chickpea Burgers are made with lentils, chickpeas, onions, Italian bread crumbs and seasonings. This recipe makes 10 burgers. These can be reheated in the oven, microwave or a pan on the stove.

Slow Cooker Freezer Meals



Kielbasa and Split Pea Soup



Lentil Goulash

Slide 15: Slow Cooker Freezer Meals

Kielbasa sausage, potatoes, carrots and green split peas are featured in this Kielbasa and Split Pea Soup recipe. It pairs nicely with fresh bread.

This Lentil Goulash can be ready in six to eight hours. The main ingredients include lentils, tomato paste and a variety of vegetables, including carrots, onions, green pepper and zucchini. Serve over pasta.

Slow Cooker Freezer Meals



Hamburger Lentil Soup



Coconut Chickpea Curry

Slide 16: Slow Cooker Freezer Meals (continued)

Ground beef and lentils are joined by carrots, celery, onion and tomato juice, along with spices and vegetable broth, to round out this Hamburger Lentil Soup. It makes 12 (1-cup) servings with 200 calories and 17 grams of protein per serving.

Coconut Chickpea Curry also is a tomato-based recipe. Other notable ingredients include coconut milk, honey, chickpeas and frozen green peas. Serve curry over rice or pasta. This recipe provides 10 grams of fiber per serving, which is 40 percent of your daily needs if consuming a 2,000-calorie-per-day diet.

Slow Cooker Freezer Meals



Sloppy Lentils



Lentil Butternut Squash Curry

Slide 17: Slow Cooker Freezer Meals (continued)

For a healthier twist on the classic sloppy joe, give Sloppy Lentils a try. Lentils are combined with onion, tomato sauce, tomato paste, ketchup, mustard powder, chili powder, molasses, vinegar and chicken broth to make this one flavorful recipe. Serve on whole-wheat buns or bread.

Red lentils are paired with diced butternut squash, onion and tomatoes in this Lentil Butternut Squash Curry. Coconut milk, curry powder and red pepper give this recipe just the right amount of flavor. This recipe makes 10 (1-cup) servings.



Slide 18: Questions

To recap: Today, we explored types of pulse foods, how they can benefit our health and how we can incorporate them into freezer meals. We also talked about what freezer meals are and the steps for preparing a freezer meal, as well as some helpful tips. And finally we ended by talking about some delicious and healthful recipes. If you are interested in more information, visit the NDSU Extension website www.ag.ndsu.edu/food and click on “pulse crops.”

You can pass out the bingo cards and play Pulse Bingo after you have completed the lesson. Allow participants to taste one of the recipes if you have chosen to prepare a recipe from this lesson.



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