

Tips for Freezing Meals in Bulk

By Ann Marie Monteiro



Make-ahead freezer meals are more important than ever. Not all meals are freezer friendly, so here are some Kurbo tips to help! Chilis, soups, stews, casseroles, stir-fries and pasta bakes are great choices because these meals won't dry out easily when reheated.

Tips for freezing meals

1. Cool food to room temperature, leaving out no more than the safe limit of two hours, before freezing. Cut large dishes like pasta bakes or casseroles into halves or quarters to promote quicker cooling and defrosting.
2. Choose air-tight containers like plastic resealable freezer bags, quart containers with tight fitting lids, glass jars with screw on tops or tightly wrapped aluminum pans.
3. Leave an inch or two of space between the food and the lid as food expands as it freezes.
4. Label all containers with the meal contents and date it was prepared using a sharpie and masking tape. When properly frozen and stored, fully cooked food generally retains its quality for 3 – 6 months.
5. Place containers in the freezer in a single layer to encourage quick freezing. Once fully frozen feel free to stack containers in a way that's most efficient for storage.

When you're ready to thaw

1. Defrost a day ahead in the refrigerator. Defrosting overnight in the refrigerator keeps food in the safe zone of 40 degrees to prevent foodborne illness. Never defrost at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
2. If you haven't planned ahead and your food is stored in a microwave-safe container microwave on the defrost setting a few minutes at a time.
3. Casserole and pasta bakes are particularly easy to warm. Heat the oven to 350 degrees, cover the dish with aluminum foil and heat 20 – 30 minutes if thawed or 60 minutes if warming from frozen.

Chicken Enchiladas Casserole

Serves 4

1 closed fist = 1 green light, 1 yellow light

Ingredients

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 large bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 2 15 oz cans pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 3 cups enchilada sauce
- 1 cup non-fat shredded Mexican cheese blend
- 12 corn tortillas

Directions

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Grease a 9x13 casserole dish with non-fat cooking spray. Set aside.

Grease a large saute pan with non-fat cooking spray and heat over medium-high. Add onions and pepper to the pan and saute for 5 – 7 minutes or until tender and golden. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute longer.

To a large bowl add onion mixture, shredded chicken, pinto beans, 2 cups enchilada sauce and cheese. Gently stir to combine.

Spread ½ cup enchilada sauce on the bottom of the casserole dish and reserve the other ½ cup of the sauce for later. Top with 4 tortillas, one third of the chicken and bean mixture, 4 more tortillas one third of the chicken and bean mixture, 4 more tortillas and the final third of the chicken and bean mixture. Top with 4 tortillas and the reserved enchilada sauce.

Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake 15 minutes more. Cool to room temperature and freeze using the tips above.