



Turn Your Freezer Into A Fresh-Meal Planner

(NAPSA)—With today's busy schedules, Americans have less and less time to buy, wash and prep fresh ingredients to make a home-cooked meal. The good news is that a fresh meal may be closer, and more convenient, than you think—it's in the freezer. When food is frozen properly, it can taste as fresh as the day it was frozen. Here are some tips to help make the most of the freezer and boost any cook's ability to serve a delicious and easy meal.

Stock your freezer with these five flexible staples that can be used in a variety of dishes:

- Meat, such as chicken breasts, ground beef or steaks, are good to have on hand because they can be incorporated into a variety of meals.

- Assorted vegetables, such as broccoli florets, peas and bell pepper strips. Having a good variety makes it easy to add vegetables to just about every meal, whether as a side dish or a stir-fry.

- Fruit, like peaches, blueberries and strawberries freeze exceptionally well. Enjoy thawed in a fruit salad or toss in a blender with ice cream and milk for a "fresh" fruit milkshake.

- Sauces, like Alfredo and marinara, freeze well and are easy to heat for a quick pasta dinner.

For tips on keeping frozen foods fresh, consider these easy-to-follow freezer storage guidelines from the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association

1. Maintain proper freezer temperature—not higher than 0° F. Use a refrigerator/freezer thermometer to verify setting.
2. Rotate and clearly date your frozen foods—first in, first out.
3. Arrange the contents of your freezer in an orderly way. Store baked goods in one section, meat and fish in another, etc.
4. Do not refreeze thawed frozen foods, for safety and quality reasons.
5. Keep your freezer clean to prevent transfer of off tastes and odors.
6. Have sufficient storage space so that refrigerated air can circulate around the food. 

- Frozen prepared foods, such as Stouffer's, are made with the highest-quality ingredients and come in a variety of sizes, which makes them a reliable, quick meal you can feel good about serving to family or guests.

Think "bulk" when grocery shopping and cooking. Thinking

in "bulk" will save the number of trips needed to the grocery store as well as time spent in the kitchen. For example, ground beef is more economical when purchased in larger quantities. Since many recipes call for one pound of ground beef, it's smartest to buy a family-sized portion of ground beef and freeze in one-pound portions. That way, the exact amount is ready when needed. Cooking in bulk and freezing the leftovers is a great option, as well. Many sauces and soups are easier to cook in one large batch. Since they freeze well, simply divide leftovers into smaller portions that can be thawed as needed.

Label foods with description and date. There's nothing like reaching into the back of your freezer and pulling out what could either be frozen raspberries or frozen spaghetti sauce. Labeling foods eliminates this guessing game. Some frozen prepared meals, like Stouffer's, come labeled with a "best by" date on the package to ensure optimal freshness.

For quick and easy frozen meal ideas, visit Web sites such as VeryBestBaking.com and Meals.com. For more information on the freshness of frozen prepared foods, visit FreshFrozen.com.