

**Microwave  
Meals  
in a Hurry**

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**EMPLOYED  
HOMEMAKER**



Texas Agricultural Extension Service  
The Texas A&M University System  
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## Microwave Meals in a Hurry

*Marilyn A. Haggard\**

Microwave ovens are time-savers for many busy Texans. Used at their optimum, they can be both time and energy savers. However, optimum use takes practice. Beginners should allow plenty of time to prepare complete meals. Select dishes that are family favorites and use tested recipes. Learning to adapt recipes for microwave cooking comes later with experience. In general, advance meal planning is the key to getting the most out of this modern convenience appliance.

Consider these three factors when planning complete microwave meals: holding time, standing time and reheating.

### **Holding Time**

Some foods retain heat longer than others, depending on the density and size of the food. For example, whole carrots stay hot longer than sliced carrots. Cooking and then serving food in the same dish extends holding time. So does wrapping or covering the food in plastic wrap or foil, or covering it with a lid.

Cook foods with a long holding time (20 to 45 minutes) first. Large roasts, unsliced hams, turkey, baked potatoes, corn on the cob and squash and potato casseroles will remain hot while you microwave the rest of the meal.

Most casseroles, whole vegetables, sliced meats or chicken pieces, medium-sized roasts and pies can be held 10 to 20 minutes and still be served hot. Bread and rolls, sliced carrots, green beans, whole kernel corn, hamburgers, fish fillets and pork chops can be held only 3 to 10 minutes before serving and should be cooked as close to mealtime as possible.

### **Standing Time**

Standing time allows foods such as meats, eggs, bacon, chicken, fish, baked potatoes and corn to continue cooking after removal from the oven. Cover

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these foods to prevent heat loss. Standing time is usually indicated in recipes and should be considered when meal planning.

## Reheating

The time needed to reheat precooked foods is another factor to consider when planning complete microwave meals. The instructions provided with the oven are the best guide to reheating. Most foods can be reheated on the high power level, except for meats, refrigerated main dishes and individual plates of food, which should be reheated at 50 percent power. Thinner, smaller pieces of food reheat more quickly than large pieces. A covering prevents loss of moisture. Wax paper, plastic wrap, paper towels and ovenproof lids are all satisfactory coverings.

A casserole or a plate of food is hot enough when you can feel warmth on the bottom of the container. Be cautious when reheating foods with sugary fillings. The pastry may seem cool, but the filling may be hot enough to burn.

Follow reheating times carefully. To keep from ruining the food, check it occasionally and then continue reheating it for a few seconds or minutes longer.

## Meal Planning

Try to take full advantage of the speed of microwave cooking. Begin by writing out menus and the order of preparation. Arrange the order so that all foods are served at the proper temperature at one time. Prepare some dishes for the microwave while other foods are being defrosted or cooked.

Cook foods that require the same temperature setting together. It makes preparation faster and saves energy.

Study the following examples of organization and planning for microwave meals.

### Breakfast

Orange juice  
Hot cocoa or coffee  
Bacon  
Scrambled eggs  
Toast

### Order or preparation

Thaw frozen orange juice concentrate.  
Heat water for beverage.  
Microwave bacon.  
Microwave scrambled eggs while bread is toasted in a conventional toaster.

To save more time, place the bacon on paper towels, cover and refrigerate the night before. Also set out needed dishes and utensils and place the cups of water in the oven. In the morning, put the orange juice in the center of the cups. Microwave for 15 to 30 seconds, remove the orange juice and then finish heating the water.

#### Instant Cocoa or Coffee

Cooking time: 4 to 5 minutes at high power  
Heat four 6-ounce cups of water for 4 to 5 minutes on high power. Stir in drink mix and serve immediately. Serves four.

#### Bacon

8 Slices bacon

Cooking time: 3 to 5 minutes at high power  
Place bacon on three layers of paper towels on a paper plate or ovenproof plate. Microwave on high for 3 to 5 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes to complete cooking. With thin-sliced bacon, check after 3 minutes. Serves four.

#### Scrambled Eggs

4 eggs  
1 tablespoon butter or margarine

3 tablespoons milk

Cooking time: 2 to 3 minutes at high power.  
Put butter or margarine in serving dish; melt on high for 30 seconds. Add eggs and milk and scramble well with a fork. Microwave 1½ minutes. Break up the parts that set around the edges and push them toward the center of the dish. Microwave for the remaining time, stirring once more. Remove from the oven while still soft and moist. Eggs will continue to cook and set while standing 2 to 3 minutes. Serves four. Serve immediately after standing time.

#### Lunch

Foldover tacos with guacamole topping  
Quick custard  
Beverage

#### Order of Preparation

Prepare custard the night before; chill in refrigerator.  
Microwave ground beef for first 6 minutes.  
Prepare guacamole topping while meat is cooking.  
Complete cooking meat mixture.  
Microwave tortillas.

For greater timesaving at lunch, prepare the meat mixture the night before and reheat immediately before serving. Also, lightly butter the tortillas, return them to the original plastic bag and refrigerate overnight.

### Foldover Tacos with Guacamole Topping

1 pound ground beef	¼ cup water
2 teaspoons chili powder	1 cup American process cheese
¼ teaspoon salt	Lettuce
½ teaspoon garlic salt	1 package soft flour tortillas
Pepper to taste	

Cooking time: 10 minutes at high power

Crumble ground beef in a 1-quart casserole. Microwave on high for 6 minutes. Cover dish to prevent splattering of fat onto oven walls. Drain thoroughly. Stir in water and seasonings. Microwave an additional 2 minutes or until meat is well done. Stir in cheese and microwave 2 minutes, stirring after 1 minute.

### Guacamole Topping

1 large avocado	½ teaspoon lime or lemon juice
2 green onions, chopped	¼ teaspoon garlic or salt
1 small tomato, chopped	

Remove meat of avocado from shell and mash into a smooth pulp. Add remaining ingredients and mix well.

To serve, open one end of tortilla package. Microwave on high in the package for 30 seconds. Spoon meat mixture onto tortilla and top with guacamole topping and lettuce. For ease of serving, let family members prepare their own as desired at the table.

### Baked Custard

2 cups milk	¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup sugar	½ teaspoon vanilla
3 eggs	Nutmeg

Cooking time: 8 to 15 minutes defrost power

Combine all ingredients except nutmeg in a mixing bowl and beat well with a wire whip or rotary beater. Pour into four 6-ounce custard cups. Sprinkle with nutmeg. Microwave on medium for 8 to 13 minutes, rotating a quarter turn every 3 minutes. To make rotation easier, arrange cups in a circle on a platter and simply rotate the platter a quarter turn every 3 minutes. To make rotation easier, arrange cups in a circle on a platter and simply rotate the

platter a quarter turn each 3 minutes. Some custards may cook more quickly than others. They are done when a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Let custards stand 5 minutes before serving.

## Dinner

## Order of Preparation

Oven-fried  
chicken

Baked potatoes

Honeyed carrots

Tossed salad

Paprika cheese  
loaf

Microwave baked potatoes  
while preparing chicken for  
cooking.

Microwave chicken while  
mixing bread and preparing  
carrots for cooking.

Prepare tossed salad while  
microwaving bread and  
carrots at the same time.

Several dishes can be microwaved at one time in an oven with a shelf or rack. Cooking times may be slightly longer, but time and energy will be saved.

### Oven-Fried Chicken

1 fryer, cut into pieces or 6 chicken breast halves	2 teaspoons parsley flakes
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cornflake crumbs or seasoned bread crumbs	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese	$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter or margarine
	2 eggs

Cooking time:  $5\frac{1}{2}$  to 8 minutes per pound at high power  
Combine cornflake crumbs, cheese, parsley, salt and pepper. Melt butter on high for 1 minute until melted, but not hot. Beat eggs and stir into butter. Remove skin from chicken and dip pieces in egg and butter mixture. Coat with crumb mixture. Place thicker portion of chicken toward outside of baking dish. Cover with wax paper and microwave half the recommended time. Place least-cooked pieces toward outside of dish and microwave uncovered the remaining time. Serves four to six. Dish will hold serving temperature 10 to 20 minutes.

### Baked Potatoes

4 medium-sized potatoes

Cooking time: 10 to 12 minutes at high power  
Pierce potatoes twice with a fork and place in oven on a layer of paper towels. Arrange potatoes at least 1 inch apart. Microwave half the time, turn over and rotate. Microwave remaining time.

Wrap in foil and let stand 5 to 10 minutes to complete cooking. Potatoes will hold serving temperature up to 45 minutes.

### Honeyed Carrots

2 cups thinly sliced carrots                      2 tablespoons honey

Cooking time: 5 to 7 minutes at high power

Place carrots in 1-quart casserole dish. Add butter and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water. Cover and microwave 5 minutes. Drizzle on honey and microwave remaining time. Carrots will hold serving temperature 3 to 10 minutes.

### Paprika Cheese Loaf

2 cups pancake mix                                      1 tablespoon butter or  
1 tablespoon sugar                                      margarine  
1 cup buttermilk                                        1 cup grated cheddar  
1 egg    cheese  
Paprika

Cooking time: 8 minutes at high power

Line the bottom of an 8 x 4-inch loaf baking dish with wax paper. Do not use a smaller baking dish or the batter will run over the edges during baking. Combine all ingredients except paprika. Blend with a mixer or by hand until thoroughly mixed. Stir in cheese and pour into baking dish. Sprinkle lightly with paprika. Microwave on high for 8 minutes, giving the dish a quarter turn every 2 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving. Bread will hold serving temperature 3 to 10 minutes.

### References

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