



# MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

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Becoming a microwave cook is easy. It takes a little time and effort, but it's worth it; because then you can cook fast and get delicious results.

Before you start to cook, read the use and care book that came with your microwave. Set a glass of water in your microwave and practice setting each control. Page through your manufacturer's cookbook to see what foods microwave well.

Learn microwave basics and practice microwaving. Read your manufacturer's cookbook — especially the introduction and beginning of each recipe section — and try a few simple recipes. Clip and save this column — and other "Microwave Minutes" — underline the basics and hints, and try the recipes. If you have specific questions about a food, recipe or technique, write to me at the address below. You may also want to take a class where you can actually see foods cooked and ask questions on the spot.

Think "microwave" for everyday cooking. When you decide to cook a certain food, ask yourself, "Could I microwave this?" Chances are if it's a vegetable, sauce, pudding, fruit dessert or almost any hamburger or poultry recipe, it can be microwaved and will turn out excellent.

Follow a microwave recipe the first time you cook a particular food. Later try adapting your own favorites to microwave. Once you know how a certain microwaved food should look and taste, you'll be able to get similar results by using the same time and techniques and varying ingredients to suit your tastes.

Undercook food. Recipe times

are approximate and are just a guide, so you need to experiment a bit. Cook the least amount of time — or even less than the recipe says. If the food isn't done, you can cook it more, but if it's overcooked, it's impossible to un-cook it.

Let the food "rest" before checking for final doneness. This "standing time" is necessary to prevent overcooking. After microwaving time has ended the food continues to cook; if food is completely done already, it will probably end up dry and tough after standing time.

Understanding a few other basic microwaving terms that you see in "Microwave Minutes" and other recipes will help. Practice the following techniques. They may seem like extra work at first, but once you learn to use them and see the good results, doing them becomes automatic.

**Cover.** Use the type of cover recommended in the recipe. It does make a difference. Plastic wrap or a tight-fitting lid seals in moisture, so use these for vegetables and most casseroles. Waxed paper holds in heat without steaming. Use it for foods where a steamed effect is undesirable. Paper towels reduce spattering when microwaving bacon and sausage, or help prevent breads from becoming soggy. Some foods, like puddings and sauces, are left uncovered.

**Arrange.** When placing several small foods in at a time, arrange them in a doughnut shape, with the thickest part to the outside edges.

**Rearrange.** About halfway through cooking, rearrange foods so most-cooked parts are repositioned in dish or in oven.

**Turn over.** Some foods must be turned over halfway through cooking. Large meats need to be turned

to prevent the top from drying out. Turning over small meats - like round steak and pork chops - keeps them from overcooking and toughening. Turning over also speeds cooking of large vegetables, like whole squash and baked potatoes.

**Rotate.** Rotating the dish is necessary for some delicate foods, micro-baking and when food can't be stirred. About halfway through cooking, rotate the dish by turning it so the side closest to back of oven is closest to front of oven.

**Stir.** Stir from outside to inside, so cooked edges are moved to the center of dish. Stirring promotes even and fast cooking in many foods, such as casseroles, vegetables and scrambled eggs. Some foods — like sauces and puddings — need stirring to thicken properly.

Here are two practice recipes that use some of the techniques described above. The speedy chicken dish calls for skinned chicken and low-sodium soup to make it lower in calories and salt. Cauliflower And Peas is a beautiful looking and delicious tasting combination. Seasonings are kept to a minimum to let the fresh quick-cooked vegetable flavors speak for themselves.

**New Style-Chicken Paprika**  
2-2½ pounds broiler-chicken

parts, skinned  
1 can (10½ ounces) ready-to-serve low-sodium cream of mushroom soup  
¼ teaspoon thyme leaves  
¼ teaspoon crushed rosemary leaves

About ¼ teaspoon paprika  
Cooked rice or noodles

**Garnish:** Chopped fresh parsley

Place chicken in microwave-safe 2-quart casserole, arranging thickest part to outside edges of dish. Pour soup evenly over chicken. Sprinkle with thyme and rosemary. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 10 minutes. Turn chicken pieces over and rearrange so least-cooked parts are to outside edges of casserole. Recover with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 7 to 10 minutes more until chicken is almost done. Sprinkle chicken lightly with paprika and stir some into sauce. Let stand, covered, 5 minutes. Test for doneness by slicing near bones in thickest pieces. If not completely cooked, continue microwaving for 1½ minute intervals until done. Serve over rice or noodles and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Each serving - ¼ of recipe without rice or noodles: 288 calories, 43g protein, 8g fat, 4g carbohydrate, 131mg sodium, 151 mg

cholesterol.  
Note: You may substitute a can of regular condensed cream of mushroom soup.

## Cauliflower and Peas

1 cup frozen peas  
½ medium fresh cauliflower, cut into 1-inch flowerettes  
1 tablespoon butter or 2 tablespoons water

Dash crumbled marjoram leaves

Place peas in microwave-safe 9-inch pie plate. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 1-1½ minutes or until thawed. Push peas to center of dish. Arrange cauliflower flowerettes around dish edges to make a border. Dot peas with butter or sprinkle with water. Sprinkle with marjoram. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 3 to 4 minutes, rotating dish once, or until cauliflower is almost tender. Let stand, covered, 5 minutes. Makes 4 servings.

Each serving: 67 calories, 4g protein, 3g fat, 7g carbohydrate, 86mg sodium, 9mg cholesterol.

Joyce Battcher is an independent home economist microwave specialist. She is author of "Microwave Family Favorites" and editor of "A Batch of Ideas" newsletter.

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