



MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

Stop at the deli after work, use leftovers or start from scratch. Either way, your microwave can help you whip up hearty hot sandwiches for supper.

Today's recipes give you lots of choices. If you have the time, make the fillings from scratch. It takes less than five minutes to cook the chicken or beef. Or, follow the Super Quick version after each recipe, which calls for cooked meat and a very short heating time.

First a word about micro-heating sandwiches, because you probably have some of your own favorites to try.

Heating one sandwich in your microwave often takes no more than 30 seconds on High. However, a lower power setting — like Defrost or Medium — heats the filling more evenly. A lower power is better especially if the filling is thick, contains cheese or is icy cold. A lower power also is better when heating more than one sandwich. Allow one to two minutes on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) for a large sandwich containing lots of cold filling. Allow less time if filling is hot. For more than two sandwiches, allow about 30 seconds each on Medium.

About six large or eight small sandwiches are the most that a

full-size microwave oven can successfully heat at a time. Arrange sandwiches in a single layer on a microwave meat rack or on paper towels. If possible, arrange them in a doughnut shape with the center open. Cover with paper towel. Microwave on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) 2½ to 3½ minutes or until rolls feel just slightly warm or until cheese barely starts to melt.

If sandwiches are heated too long — for example, cheese melts completely or rolls feel hot — they will taste less than perfect. Rolls will taste tough and rubbery and, as they cool, will dry out. Cheese, as it cools, will turn rubbery.

Microwave individual sandwiches wrapped in a paper towel or napkin. The paper towel wrap helps the sandwich heat fast and evenly. It absorbs some moisture given off by the bread as it heats, preventing the roll from becoming soggy. Do not substitute plastic wrap, a plastic bag or cellophane wrapper — these steam and overcook the bread, letting it become soggy and rubbery. Waxed paper or a waxed paper bag is not the right choice either. Both hold in heat but don't let moisture escape — again the result is a soggy roll

that tastes tough.

For more than two sandwiches, instead of wrapping each individually in a paper towel, heat them on a microwave bacon rack, steamer rack or several paper towels and cover them with several paper towels. Roll bottoms will not get soggy (provided they aren't heated too long) and sandwiches will heat evenly.

All sandwiches micro-heat, but some heat better than others. Thinly sliced meats will heat faster than thick pieces of meat. Of course, cold filling will need slightly longer heating time than warm or room temperature filling. For the roll or bread part, heavy textured breads — such as a homemade-style whole-wheat or rye — are good. Toast bread or soft rolls — like hamburger rolls — in a toaster (or in the broiler if you're making lots) before adding filling. Choose rolls with texture — like an English muffin (toasted), a Kaiser roll, French roll, or a bagel (toasted or untoasted).

Texas Beef Barbecue

½ pound beef sirloin or top round steak, cut ¼-inch thick
1 small onion, thinly sliced and separated into rings
¼ teaspoon chili powder
¼ teaspoon garlic powder, optional

½ small green pepper, thinly sliced
Salt and pepper
2-4 Kaiser rolls, small French loaves or toasted hamburger rolls
Thick barbecue sauce
2-4 slices Cheddar or Swiss cheese

Cut beef into ¼-inch thick strips. Stir together beef strips, onion, chili powder and garlic powder in 1-quart microwave-safe

casserole. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes, stirring well after each 1 minute, or until beef is still slightly pink. Add pepper strips; re-cover. Microwave (High) 30 to 60 seconds or until peppers are desired doneness. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Lightly butter rolls. Top with beef mixture; drizzle each with about ½ tablespoon barbecue sauce. Top with cheese and roll top. Microwave on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) 1 to 1½ minutes or until cheese barely starts to melt. Makes 2 large or 4 small sandwiches.

Each large sandwich: 497 calories, 34g protein, 24g fat, 33g carbohydrate, 583mg sodium, 98mg cholesterol.

Super Quick (with cooked roast beef): Layer thin slices of cooked beef on lightly buttered Kaiser roll. Top with thinly sliced or chopped raw onion and green pepper. Drizzle with barbecue sauce; top with cheese and roll top. Place on a microwave bacon rack or a paper towel-lined tray. Cover with paper towel. Microwave on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) until cheese barely starts to melt. For 1 sandwich, microwave 1 to 1½ minutes; for more than 1, allow about 45 to 60 seconds for each sandwich.

French Chicken Dijon Sandwich

2 (3-4 ounces each) boneless chicken breast halves
Onion powder
Black pepper
Paprika
Toasted large hamburger or Kaiser rolls
Dijon mustard
4 thin slices ham
2 slices Mozzarella or Swiss cheese

Sprinkle both sides of chicken with onion powder, black pepper and paprika. Shape each into a rounded patty in a microwave-safe pie plate. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 1 minute; turn patties over, rearrange in dish and re-cover. Microwave

(High) 1 to 1½ minutes or until center looks done. Let stand 3 minutes before testing for final doneness.

Meanwhile, spread rolls with dijon mustard. Place chicken on roll bottom. Top with ham and cheese. Microwave on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) 1 to 1½ minutes or until cheese barely starts to melt. Makes 2 large sandwiches.

Each sandwich: 362 calories, 38g protein, 12g fat, 22g carbohydrate, 399mg sodium, 104mg cholesterol.

Hint: Microwave 2 prepared breaded chicken patties according to package directions. (Usual time is about 1½ minutes on High per patty. Cover with waxed paper.) Continue as above.

Super Quick (with cooked chicken or turkey): Lightly spread rolls with dijon mustard. Layer roll with thin slices of cooked chicken or turkey. Top with ham, cheese and roll top. Place on a microwave bacon rack or a paper towel-lined tray. Cover with paper towel. Microwave on Medium (50% power, 325-350 watts) until cheese barely starts to melt. For 1 sandwich, microwave 1 to 1½ minutes; for more than 1, allow about 45 to 60 seconds for each sandwich.

Questions for Joyce?

Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, % Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903. Please include a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope.

Recipes in this column are tested in 600- and 650-watt microwave ovens. With an oven of different wattage output, timings may need slight adjustment.

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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