

MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

When you're busy getting ready for graduations, showers, garage sales and other spring events, there's not much time to cook a meal. Your microwave and a pound of ground meat can help.

Many favorite recipes start by precooking a pound of ground beef or other ground meat, such as ground turkey, ground pork, and ground bulk seasoned pork sausage. Try using your microwave instead of a skillet on the range top. You'll be surprised at how convenient it is.

Microwave times and directions are about the same for all kinds of ground meat or poultry. Use High power. Microwave about five minutes per pound. Time varies because of differences in microwave ovens and differences in temperature and amount of fat in ground meats.

Use a waxed-paper or paper-towel cover or any other loose cover, such as a paper plate or casserole lid set off-side. These types of covers allow extra moisture to escape, yet hold in some heat and promote even cooking.

Stir several times during cooking to break up chunks and ensure even doneness.

Drain some meats. Leanness of the ground meat determines if fat should be drained or not. With extra-lean ground beef, lean ground pork, or ground turkey, the small amount of fat and juices adds flavor to the meat, and so are usually not discarded. You may want to precook regular ground beef or pork sausage in a microwave steamer basket with small holes, a microwave-safe colander, or a special accessory called a Ground Beef Cooker (a clear, microwave-safe, plastic pie-plate-shaped dish with holes in the bottom to let fat drip through). All allow fat to drip away as meat cooks.

Ground beef labeled "lean"

(about 77 percent to 81 percent lean) is best for microwaving. With regular ground beef, sometimes labeled hamburger (about 70 percent to 76 percent lean), there is fat to drain and more shrinkage. Extra-lean ground beef (about 82 percent to 86 percent lean) is more expensive, but is fine for casseroles, chill or other combinations.

Ground pork is at least 70 percent lean and contains no seasonings. Usually it's sold fresh in the meat counter. Fresh pork sausage is seasoned, but not cured or smoked. It contains at least 50 percent lean, but often is leaner. (Check package labels.) Look for it in the meat and frozen foods sections.

Ground turkey or ground chicken is found fresh in large supermarkets or frozen in smaller stores. Microwaved ground poultry can get a "boiled" taste, yet a dried-out texture. To prevent this, add seasonings before cooking and cover with a paper towel during cooking. Microwave until poultry is no longer pink. Avoid overcooking, but, for safety, cook to well-done.

Ground poultry can toughen and form a firm, dry lump during cooking. To prevent this, crumble it into cooking dish and stir with a fork several times during cooking to break up pieces. Add seasonings to it before cooking to help it flavor through. Do not drain to retain flavor.

Using ground turkey to make Turkey Salad Sandwiches is a healthy, convenient choice when you don't have turkey leftovers. It's a good low-sodium alternative to canned turkey, which usually has salt added. And, it's a welcome substitute for fresh turkey pieces since it eliminates the bother of slow cooking, boning and chopping.

Taco Spoon Pie is a new crea-

tion of mine. It's an easy way to bring a special-looking dish to the table. It looks like a taco pie that took an hour or so to bake. In fact, it only takes about eight minutes to cook. Instead of slicing it in wedges to serve, let the people help themselves, spooning the mixture into tacos or tortillas.

Turkey Salad Sandwiches

- 1-1/4 pounds ground fresh turkey
- 1/2 cup finely chopped onion
- 1/4 teaspoon ground poultry seasoning
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/4 cup sweet pickle relish or chutney
- 4-6 tablespoons mayonnaise or salad dressing
- Salt and pepper (optional)
- 6 buttered rolls or 12 bread slices

Crumble ground turkey into microwave-safe 2-quart casserole. With a fork, stir in onion and poultry seasoning; cover with a paper towel. Microwave (High) 4 to 5 minutes, stirring with a fork and breaking up chunks after each 2 minutes. Cook until turkey is no longer pink. Stir well. Refrigerate until well chilled.

Stir together cold cooked ground turkey, celery, relish and mayonnaise. Season to taste with salt and pepper, if desired. Spread mixture on 6 rolls or on 6 slices of bread; top with lettuce and roll tops of remaining slices of bread. Mixture keeps refrigerated for 2 days. Makes 6 sandwiches.

Hint: Stir thoroughly at times indicated. Check to be sure turkey is cooked until well-done by stirring after cooking and looking to see that no pinkness remains.

Each serving: 325 calories, 22g protein, 15g fat, 23g carbohydrate, 374mg sodium, 58mg cholesterol.

Taco Spoon Pie

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup ketchup

- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and pepper (optional)
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- Taco shells or tortillas
- Chopped onion
- Thinly sliced lettuce
- Diced tomato
- Sliced black olives

Place ground beef in a microwave-safe 9- to 10-inch pie plate, forming a doughnut shape; sprinkle with onion and cover with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 4 to 5 minutes, stirring with a fork at least once during cooking to break up beef. Drain. Stir in ketchup, chili powder, garlic powder, and salt and pepper, if used. Re-cover and microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes or until hot. Spread mixture evenly over pie plate; sprinkle with cheese and re-cover. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) 1 minute or until cheese starts to melt. To serve, spoon into taco

shells or tortillas. Top with remaining ingredients, as desired. Makes 5 servings.

Each serving: 453 calories, 25g protein, 28g fat, 24g carbohydrate, 564mg sodium, 81mg cholesterol. 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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Summer Dairy Promotion Features Ice Cream

CEDAR KNOLLS, NJ — The American Dairy Association and Dairy Council (ADADC) will team up with Nabisco this summer in a special promotion featuring ice cream and cookies.

Recent research indicates that consumers often run out of ice cream a week before they repurchase it.

In response to this research, ADADC's goal is to encourage consumers to "double up" their ice cream purchases. The nationwide promotion features television advertising, newspaper inserts and supermarket displays.

A special two-week television ad sponsored by the National Dairy Board will run during early

July. There will also be a coupon insert in the July 15 edition of newspapers. A total of \$9.2 million will be spent on the total promotion.

Ice cream promotion materials will appear at the freezer case as well as end-aisle displays. An in-store, mail-in coupon will provide consumers with a \$2 coupon for their next ice cream purchase. To qualify, consumers must mail in proofs-of-purchase from a half-gallon of ice cream and two packages of Nabisco cookies.

ADADC will place the retail effort with local supermarket chains. Over 2,000 stores in ADADC's region are expected to participate.



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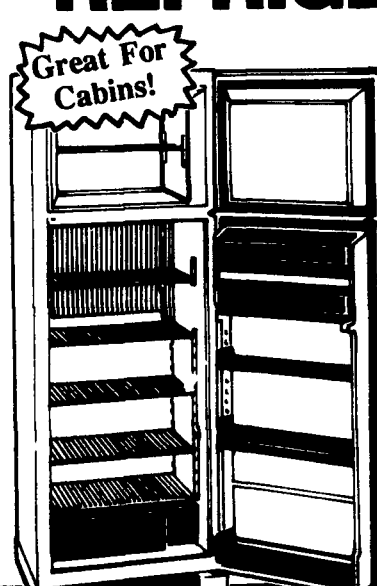
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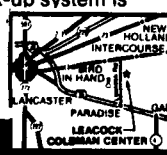
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