



MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

Meatballs have always been an easy and economical dish to make. Now with your microwave oven, cooking meatballs is also quick and convenient. Here are some hints for success and two delicious recipes for you to try.

First the meat. For meatballs, extra lean ground beef (about 82 percent to 86 percent lean), gives good results. The other added ingredients, such as liquid (eggs, milk, etc.) and starch (crumbs, oatmeal, etc.) help keep the meat juicy and tender. Meatballs made with regular ground beef, sometimes labeled hamburger, (about 70 percent to 76 percent lean) shrink and produce extra fat to drain off. (For microwaved hamburgers and casseroles, I prefer lean ground beef — about 77 percent to 81 percent lean — because it gives juicier results — especially with burgers.)

Other ground meats can be used in meatballs. Ground pork is at least 70 percent lean and contains no seasonings. Usually it's sold fresh at the meat counter. Ground turkey is found fresh in large supermarkets or frozen in smaller stores. Ground chicken (frozen), combinations of ground pork and turkey (frozen), and combinations of beef and pork are also available in some supermarkets.

All work well in meatballs. However, meatballs made with all-turkey, lighter color meats, or combinations need some paprika (or other dark seasoning) added before cooking, or a colorful sauce

stirred in after cooking to make them look appealing. In addition, meatballs made with ground turkey or chicken can taste "boiled," yet dried-out. To prevent this, microwave poultry meatballs uncovered until they are no longer pink, but are well-done.

I've done a lot of experimenting lately with combinations of ground meats. My favorite combination is: one-half pound each extra lean ground beef, lean ground pork and ground turkey. My next favorite, which contains less fat than the first, but still ends up juicy and tender, is: three-fourths pound lean ground beef and one-fourth pound ground turkey.

Mix and shape the ground meat mixture thoroughly but gently. Use a fork or your hands to mix it so the seasonings are evenly combined. Don't use a heavy hand or beat the mixture. Shape the mixture into balls by gently forming, rather than pushing the mixture together into tightly-packed perfectly-round balls. Gentle mixing and shaping leads to tender, juicy meatballs. Tough handling, plus overcooking, or not enough liquid in the uncooked mixture, will give hard-as-bullets meatballs. This is especially true with very lean meat, like ground turkey or even extra lean ground beef.

Meatballs cook fastest and most evenly in a single layer. Therefore, a flat dish is best, such as an 8x8-inch dish for a pound of meat or an 8x12-inch dish for 1 1/2

pounds. To cover, used waxed paper or the new Microwave Wrap. They hold in some heat and promote even cooking, without steaming.

Small meatballs cook faster than large ones. You may want to drain regular ground beef. With lean ground beef, lean ground pork or ground turkey, the small amount of fat and juices add flavor to the meat, so usually are not discarded.

Meatballs should be turned over and rearranged so less-done ones in the dish center are moved to the outside edges and vice versa. Do this about half-way through cooking.

Barbecued Mexican Meatballs

- 1 1/2 pounds extra lean ground beef*
- 3/4 cup quick oatmeal (not instant)
- 1 whole egg**
- 1/4 cup finely chopped onion
- 2 to 4 tablespoons (1/4 to 1 two-ounce can) chopped green chilis, undrained
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1 1/2 cup prepared barbecue sauce
- 3/4 cup thick, chunky prepared mild salsa
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup black olives

Place ground beef, oatmeal, egg, onions and chilis in a mixing bowl; sprinkle with chili powder, cumin and salt, if used. Mix gently, with a fork or hands until well combined. Gently shape mixture into about 30 meatballs. Place in microwavable 8x12 or 9x13-inch dish; cover with waxed paper or microwave paper. Microwave (High) 4 minutes; turn meatballs over and rearrange so less-cooked ones are to outside edges of dish. Re-cover and continue microwaving (High) 3 to 5 minutes or until meatballs are no longer pink. Drain, if necessary.

Stir together barbecue sauce, salsa and olives; add to meatballs. Cover with waxed paper or microwave paper. Microwave (High) 3 to 4 minutes, stirring once, or until hot. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

To reheat: (For best flavor for

this and other meatball recipes, make ahead, refrigerate and reheat.) Cover dish with waxed paper; microwave (High) 4 to 6 minutes, stirring once, until hot.

Each serving — 1/4 th of recipe: 271 calories, 19g protein, 18g fat, 10g carbohydrate, 693mg sodium, 82mg cholesterol.

* Or use a combination of ground meats, such as beef, pork and turkey.

** Or use 2 egg whites.

Stroganoff Meatballs

- 1 pound extra lean ground beef*
- 1/2 cup finely chopped onion
- 1/2 cup fine dry bread or cracker crumbs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 envelope (1.5 ounces) stroganoff sauce mix, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 can (10 1/2 ounces) "light" cream of mushroom soup
- 3/4 cup low fat dairy sour cream
- 1 can (4 ounces) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Chopped fresh parsley (optional)

Place ground beef, onion, crumbs and milk in a mixing bowl; sprinkle with half of stroganoff sauce mix, salt, if used and pepper. Mix gently, with a fork or hands until well combined. Shape mixture into 16 to 20 meatballs. Place in microwavable 8x8 or 7x11-inch dish; cover with waxed paper or microwave paper. Microwave (High) 3 minutes; turn meatballs over and rearrange so less-

cooked ones are to outside edges of dish. Re-cover and continue microwaving (High) 2 to 3 minutes or until meatballs are no longer pink. Drain, if necessary.

In a separate bowl, stir together soup, sour cream, mushrooms, Worcestershire sauce mix and remaining stroganoff sauce mix. Stir soup mixture into meatballs; cover with waxed paper or microwave paper. Microwave (High) 4 to 6 minutes, stirring twice, or until hot. If desired, sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley before serving. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Each serving — 1/5th of recipe: 404 calories, 25g protein, 22g fat, 25g carbohydrate, 856mg sodium, 83mg 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, Minn. 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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