

Food: Menu planning principles

When out walking, particularly on multi-day trips, it is important to make sure you eat enough to prevent exhaustion and the associated problems and dangers.

There are a few things to consider when menu planning. As usual some of these factors conflict with one another so it is up to you to consider what is best for you.

1) Weight.

You have to carry everything you eat once you get going, it is obviously in your best interest to make it as light as possible.

You shouldn't really consider taking tins or glass jars, However if you really, really like sardines and you know it will just make your day to have a tin then I suppose you could. Boil in the bag is heavier than dehydrated food.

Think about removing excess packaging but be careful not to remove cooking instructions you may want to refer to later.

2) Speed and ease of preparation.

If the weather is nice you may want to spend a bit of time relaxing on the campsite and cooking. If, however, it has been raining all day the last thing you are going to want to do is sit outside in the rain cooking.

Boil in the bag may be heavier than dried food but it is faster, easy to prepare and generally tastes better.

If you are buying pasta choose quick cook varieties, this will save both time and fuel. Consider practising cooking what you are going to cook at home on one hob.

3) Tastiness and variety.

You need your diet to be as varied as possible as eating the same thing every day can become really dull. I would try and get some fresh stuff in for the beginning of the trip and move onto the less tasty but longer life foods later.

4) Durability and longevity.

You need foods that will not be ruined or taste bad if they are squashed and won't leak out of any containers. If you have perishables make sure you are planning to eat them early and that you have a non-perishable equivalent for later in the expedition.

5) Calorific intake.

On expedition you will burn many more calories than usual. You should be aiming to eat something in the region of 3500 calories per day but this will vary from person to person.

6) When you get to the campsite.

When you get to the camp site you want to be eating as soon as possible. Have a snack as soon as you stop. Energy is replenished in the muscles much more effectively straight after exercise so eating immediately will give you more energy the next day. Next get your tent up in case it starts raining then start cooking your main meal.

7) Emergency rations.

Don't eat all your food on the last day. You must keep some back in case of emergency. Your assessor may well ask to see your emergency rations at the end.

Food: Menu planning in practice

Breakfast

You won't have to carry your first breakfast so make it a BIG breakfast. Consider going to cafe near your start point as a

team building exercise. After that go for cereal, sweet porridge, flapjack or anything high in energy from your lunch stash as lunch foods and breakfast foods are pretty much interchangeable. Early in your trip croissants are great as they are full of fat and it doesn't matter if they get squashed but eat them quick as they will go stale.

Make sure you are fully re-hydrated before you leave the camp each morning as anything you drink now you won't have to carry.



Snacks / Lunch

Lunch shouldn't be an event but more a process. Eat little and often. Keep food in your pockets and snack throughout the day. Good snacking foods include packets of peanuts or fruit and nut mix, flapjack, energy bars, cereal bars.

If you stop for food some suggestions are oat cakes and pate (from a toothpaste like tube), heavy, stodgy cakes (for example Fruit cake, malt loaf, Jamaica cake), If you want to eat bread products choose flat bread like pitta bread or even tastier and longer lasting, tortillas.

Health food shops do loads of different dried fruits. You can get a dozen dried bananas in a pack about the size of a fist. Dried fruit is healthier and provides a slower release energy than chocolate and is pretty indestructible. Everyone should get into dried fruit for their expedition.

Dinner

You want to get eating complex carbohydrate as soon as possible so skip your starter and get straight onto the main course. Noodles, pasta and rice all make good dinners, they are light weight, quick and easy to cook. They can be supplemented with other ingredients such as nuts, the odd carrot and packet sauces.

Many people choose boil in the bag foods. You can get a wide variety from outdoor shops and if you like curries you can get much cheaper and tastier ones from continental supermarkets. They are ready in minutes, create no washing up, generally taste pretty good and leave you with a pan of hot water to make a hot drink or soup with. The down side is that they are heavier to carry than dried foods.

After you have eaten your main course consider going back to your starter and making a cup-a-soup. Then you will be ready for desert.

Drinks

It is essential to drink enough to avoid dehydration. Drinking enough water is possibly the simplest way to do this. Weak solutions of cordial are also good.

