



31 Backpacking Food Ideas from the Appalachian Trail

Your backpacking food needs to provide high levels of nutrition, require minimal preparation and be as lightweight as possible.

Getting all of this from a variety of flavors, textures and nutritional sources is key. After an epic adventure of backpacking for 5 months on the Appalachian Trail and cycle-touring New Zealand for 3 months, I've eaten A LOT of trail food. Here is a list of the best backpacking food ideas organized by suggested meal.

Breakfast

1. Oatmeal Packets. A backpacking food staple. The best thing about these packets is that they serve as a bowl. Just add hot water to heat the oats inside. Get the variety pack.



2. Grits. You don't have to be Southern to love grits. As easy as oatmeal and can be a nice addition to mix up your meal plan.



3. Dried Fruits. Fresh fruit is generally too heavy and delicate. Dried fruit provides dense sugar which can be a healthier alternative to candy.



4. Nuts and Seeds. Calories! Salted, roasted, whatever. Nuts are a tasty way to pack in dense calories, protein and healthy fats and oils. There are countless varieties of nuts as well - peanuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, almonds, pecans, pistachios, walnuts and pumpkin seeds to name a few.

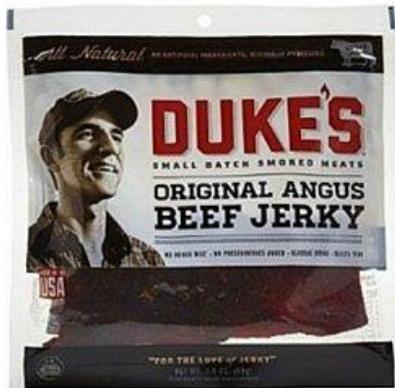


5. Powder Meals. There are a ton of 'powder' options out there. From complete meal replacements to weight lifting supplements. Aim to keep it minimally processed, provide nutrition and taste good.



Lunch

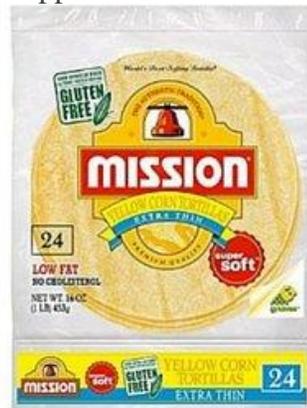
6. Meats. Beef jerky, salami and tuna are my favorite non-cook meats for the trail. None of them need refrigeration. All of them are tasty and high in protein and sodium. Great for a quick lunch.



7. Cheese. Cheese can be a heavy food for some ultralight backpackers. However, it can provide a lot of calories and fat. Not to mention, it can really enhance the meat flavor. Aim for 'harder' cheeses - they are more shelf stable.



8. Tortillas. Bread can be too bulky and fluffy for backpacking. Tortillas are compact and can take a beating. Great for wraps - Peanut Butter and M&Ms, Meat and Cheese, Hummus and Peppers. Mmmmmm.



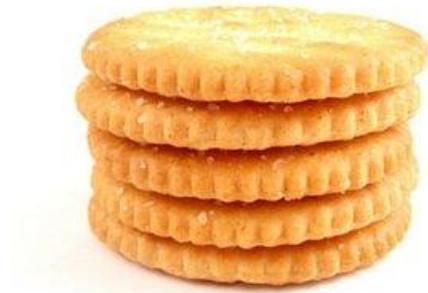
9. Greenbelly Meal. The best backpacking meal. Ready-to-eat, ultralight and loaded with a balanced 33% of your DV of Calories, Protein, Fats, Fiber, Carbs and Sodium. All natural ingredients.



10. Bagels. If tortillas are too flat, bagels can help provide that nice 'fluff' texture of bread. They are a more pack-able and less delicate option.



11. Crackers. High in carbohydrates and sodium. Hang them on the outside of your pack with a bandanna if you think they'll get smashed inside.



Dinner

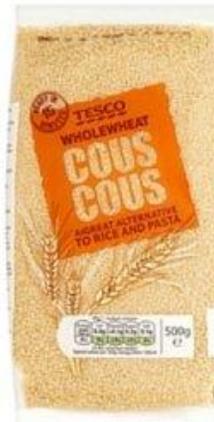
12. Instant Noodles. Get noodles instead of pasta. Seasoned noodles generally don't need a lot of cleanup compared to creamy pastas which can leave your bowl or cup a sticky mess. They also have a lot of carbohydrates.



13. Instant Rice. A great base for a backpacking dinner meal. There are also countless rice varieties with different seasonings and veggie fixin's at the store.



14. Couscous. Cooks in 5 minutes - much faster than rice or noodles. The light texture can be a nice dinner relief. High in fiber. A little less filling in my opinion though.



15. Instant Potatoes. Another backpacking staple and great meal base. Ultralight backpacking food with carbs and sodium. Add meat, oil or spices to liven it up.



16. Dried Veggies. It is hard to eat healthy food on the trail. Dried vegetables are an exception. You can add them to any of the items listed above (noodles, rice, couscous, potatoes) and have a nice backcountry meal.



17. Lentils. I had not ever eaten this until the Appalachian Trail. In the legume family (with peanuts and peas), Lentils are an ancient superfood rich in calories, protein, fiber and Iron. Takes a few extra minutes to cook.



18. Freeze Dried Meals. Add hot water, stir, seal and then wait a few minutes. Plenty of options of flavors, recipes and brands to chose from for dinner.



Snacks

19. Chews and Gels. Chews have a gummy/ candy-like consistency. Goos and gels have a honey-like consistency. All can range in what they aim to provide - caffeine, electrolytes, etc.



20. Peanut (or Almond) Butter. The king of backpacking food. Crammed with calories, fat, sodium and protein. Ready-to-eat and can eat with almost anything.



21. Honey. Let peanut butter be the food of choice for the savory loving backpacking community. But, give the sweet award to honey. Sweeten up your tea or crackers or eat it straight.



22. Granola Bar. Too many options to name. There are protein bars, energy bars, snack bars, nutrition bars, food bars - you name it. Ready-to-eat and usually high in nutrition. Keep it natural and minimally processed.



23. Hummus. A lesser known backpacking superfood. Like peanut butter, it can be lathered on almost anything. On top of the yummy taste, hummus is dense calories, carbs, protein and fiber.



Drinks

24. Tabs. Great source for electrolytes and enhances hydration. Tastes great. Drop a tab in your water and watch it fizz away (like Alka-Seltzer).



25. Powder Mixes. Similar benefits as the tabs - electrolytes and enhances hydration. Usually with a lot more flavor options and some have vitamin and mineral enhancements.



26. Hot Drink- Tea, Coffee, Hot Chocolate, Cider. I drink instant coffee in the morning and tea at night. Chamomile tea before bed is a nice way to end the day after some strenuous hiking.



Extras

27. Multivitamin. Get those vitamins and minerals without the bulky food. Particularly good to get your Vitamin C and Calcium which are less easy to come by in shelf stable trail food.



28. Fruit Powders. Another hidden backpacking food gem. Pour fruit powder into an ounce of water and take a healthy fruit drink shot. Great way to get some fruit nutrition without the weight.



29. Olive Oil. Super dense calories and fat. It can add some much needed moisture to a dry noodle or rice dish... crackers and tuna as well. A little 5 oz bottle will do. Pack in an isolated bag in case it busts.



30. Spices - salt, pepper, garlic, chili. Keep your carb dinners (noodle, rice, cous cous, potatoes) plain and spice it up to your liking with a DIY seasoning kit. Portion it into smaller zip loc bags to save weight.

