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Debunking Microwave Myths: Facts vs. Fiction



Article

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Microwave ovens have been helping families cook meals quickly and with less mess for more than half a century. Yet decades later, myths and misinformation persist about this staple of the kitchen counter. Today, we'll address some of these misconceptions so you can make the most of your microwave and create healthy, flavorful meals the whole family will enjoy.

Myth #1: Microwave Ovens Release Harmful Radiation

Yes, microwave ovens use radiation to heat food, but in this respect, they are hardly unique. In fact, *all* forms of cooking food rely on thermal radiation that can be harmful when put in direct contact with your body (hands off the stove, please).

The good news is that thermal radiation from your microwave stays contained within the oven — keeping external parts like doors and handles cool and free from the overheating common to traditional ovens and toasters.

Myth #2: Microwaves Destroy Your Food’s Nutrients

Put plainly, cooking in a microwave doesn’t affect your meal’s nutrition. Just like with traditional cooking methods, the changes that occur in microwaved food are due to the release of thermal energy — what we call heat. Foods such as parboiled rice and steamable veggies are prepared and packaged in ways that seal in nutrients, making them perfect choices for microwave cooking. Of course, overheating any food will impact its nutritional value, so keep an eye on that baked potato!

Myth #3: Microwaves Are Only Good for Junk Food

While popcorn, leftover pizza and TV dinners are popular uses for the microwave, there’s so much more this versatile and convenient tool can offer to your diet. For instance, flash-frozen vegetables are picked at the peak of freshness, then immediately frozen and sealed in microwave-safe bags to preserve their nutrients and crisp texture. Staples such as rice and legumes also cook wonderfully in the microwave and can serve as the foundation for a wide variety of meals. Plus, rice products designed for microwave cooking, like Ben's Original™ Ready Rice™, can cook in just 90 seconds.

Microwaves can even make it easier to maintain healthy eating habits. With a little meal planning, you can cook nutritious meals in advance, freeze them, and later let your microwave do what it does best: heat food quickly and conveniently. With just a bit more effort on the front end, you’ll dodge the fast-food bullet in favor of a fresh, home-cooked meal.

Myth #4: Microwave Cooking Dries Out Your Food

As with any cooking method, timing and technique are key to maintaining the right texture and moisture level in your food. The average microwave offers a wide variety of preset modes and power levels, though many users only use the one or two they feel comfortable with. Take a glance at your owner’s manual (manuals for most models can be found online) for a rundown of your microwave oven’s range of settings.

You can also add a small amount of water to your dish or cover your meal with a damp paper towel to avoid nuking foods that tend to overheat and dry out.

Myth #5: Microwaves Zap Your Food’s Flavor

Be mindful of what sort of flavorful reactions your microwave can and can’t produce. You wouldn’t use a deep fryer to get the sizzle and char of a grilled steak; similarly, it’s smart to learn which of your favorite recipes and dishes the microwave is best suited to cook.

For example, microwaving casseroles can be a simple, tasty way to use up leftovers and other produce. Cheesy broccoli risotto and fluffy sweet potatoes? Sure thing! Crispy French fries and freshly baked bread? Not so much.

Myth #6: Microwave Ovens Can’t Cook Food Evenly

We may not recommend plonking a raw turkey on your turntable, but that doesn’t mean you can’t get consistent texture and temperature from microwaved food.

While foods prepackaged specifically for microwave cooking tend to cook evenly without much effort, you have more control than you might think over how a microwave heats food that you arrange yourself. Try using ceramic or glass containers, which manage heat better than plastic, and plate the food uniformly so it's roughly the same depth from end to end. Remember that a damp paper towel can also help absorb and evenly distribute heat.

Myth #7: Microwaved Containers Break Down in Your Food

If you're using the right type of container, microwaving won't damage it or release toxins into your food. This is because microwave-safe containers such as glass and ceramics work by allowing the radiation to simply pass through the container and into your food. Aluminum and other metal containers do the opposite and should never be used in a microwave. (Don't believe us? YouTube it.)

Single-use plastic containers (especially those used to store cold foods) and Styrofoam are also no-nos. Earthenware and stoneware are safer but should be avoided if possible; these fragile and porous containers may absorb liquids, leading to cracking.

Keep in mind that even though microwaves don't heat microwave-safe containers directly, they can still become hot from the food cooking in them. So, even when your dish is safe to microwave, be sure to exercise the same cautions you would when removing food from a traditional oven — your fingers will thank you!

MICROWAVE-SAFE CONTAINERS	CONTAINERS TO AVOID MICROWAVING
• Glass	• Aluminum and other metals
• Porcelain and other ceramics	• Earthenware and stoneware
• Reusable plastic food storage	• Single-use plastics
	• Cold-storage plastics
	• Styrofoam

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