



Whether it's Larapinta, Bibbulman, or The Overland Track – one thing you need to consider ahead of a multi-day hike is the kind of food you'll need to fuel your body for the entire journey.



It's key to consider the kind of food you'll need to fuel your body on a multi-day hike.

Lightweight Cooking Appliances

Given the limited space available in a hiking pack or on a bike, it's recommended to use a compact hike stove for meal preparation. Cooking on a campfire or BBQ is not always convenient when hiking or riding in remote areas, and often not allowed due to fire bans. The 360 Degrees Furno Stove only weighs in at 99g, and there's the popular MSR Pocket Rocket compact stove weighing in at just 85 too. These are perfect for hiking or adventure bike riding, as they fold down to fit in the palm of your hand and slide easily into pack pockets and bike panniers. With the gas canister and complete pot set, the 360 Degrees Furno stove weighs in at just 385g!

How much weight should I allow for food each day?

On average, 700g–1kg of food per day is recommended. This will depend on how much you know your body will need. Bring a small surplus in case you've underestimated your appetite or ultimately spend an extra night on the trail. An extra meal plus snacks should cover you.



Bring a small surplus of food in case you ultimately spend an extra night on the trail. Image: Sea to Summit

Where can I find lightweight hiking food?

Meal prep for hiking can be as easy as hitting up your local supermarket/s. Condiments, snacks, breakfasts, lunches, and dinners can all be bought here – but for more specialised items like freeze-dried meals and nutritional supplements, head online to your favourite outdoors store, or health food supplier.

How should I pack my meals?

Firstly, don't leave it until the night before!

It's best to plan ahead of time prep food bit by bit in the weeks or days leading up to your getaway. Avoid unnecessary weight and occupying precious pack space by removing all excess packaging. Ziplock bags are perfect for hiking, as they're super lightweight and form a tight, leak-proof seal to keep meals fresh.

Pre-mix your meals too – for example, condiments. You'd be surprised at how similar food can look in low light conditions!

You can also separate your meals into different bags throughout your pack. So, rather than sorting through lunches and dinners looking for your brekkie, go straight to your breakfast bag and retrieve the day's meal according to its number.



A day's worth of food (approximately) might look like this.

Breakfast

Depending on your schedule, you may like to eat something that involves the least amount of prep time, such as a muesli or power bar. Alternatively, you might want something warm in your belly to start the day – especially on a chilly morning! Instant oatmeal with honey, fruit, or nuts is a solid choice and a substantial way start to a long day of hiking.

If you've planned a 'rest' day and wish to indulge in a cooked breakfast, you could bring instant pancake mix. It's a good idea to have this portioned out into Ziplock bags, so you're not stuck with the larger plastic container they're often packaged in on the shelves. Simply add water and shake, before pouring into a lightweight skillet or fry pan. Add in a cup of tea or coffee, and you'll be ready kick it to the summit!

Breakfast Food Options:

- Instant Oatmeal
- Muesli
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Pre-made pancake mix and powdered milk
- Muesli bars
- Specialised protein or energy bars
- Pre-packaged blends (e.g. Back Country Cuisine's Yoghurt & Muesli, Porridge Supreme, or Cooked Breakfast)
- High-performance breakfasts (e.g. the Radix Nutrition range: Apple, Cinnamon & Turmeric, or Mixed Berry).

Lunch

For lunch, you'll want something easy to prepare without the need to fire up your stove.

Some hikers prefer to keep their momentum going, so instead of taking a lunch break they snack at intervals throughout the day. This sustains and stabilises their energy.

Crackers, wraps, or dense bread with basic toppings are an excellent staple for lunch. If you're a vegetarian, add sundried tomatoes, tahini, or nut butter. If you eat meat and dairy – tuna, salami, or cheese are substantial protein options. Just add your favourite condiments!

On-The-Go Lunch Options

- Crackers or biscuits
- Pita bread
- Tortillas
- Rye or dense bread
- Cheese



- Sundried tomatoes
- Deli meats
- Dried meats (i.e. jerky)
- Tuna
- Tahini or nut butter
- Honey, jam, chutney, or relish

Dinner

More of a gourmet eater? You might prefer preparing your own meals on the trail. Carbs such as instant rice, pasta, couscous, and noodles can be cooked with some protein and/or dehydrated vegetables. Add a sauce or spice blend, and you'll have a pretty tasty meal providing the protein, carbohydrates, and fats you need after a day of exertion!

It's a good idea to include some variety in your menu too, as the same meal 7 nights in a row will likely become pretty mundane. When planning your hike, check the cooking time on specific foods. The longer the cooking time, the more fuel you'll have to bring.

Dinnertime Food Options:

- Fast cooking rice
- Pasta
- Couscous
- Noodles
- Tuna, salmon, or sardines (in a packet, not a tin)
- Jerky, salami, or other dried/deli meat
- Cheese (such as gouda or cheddar)
- Lentils
- Dried vegetables (Asian grocers are a great source)
- Instant mashed potato



You might prefer preparing your own meals on the trail. Image: JetBoil

Freeze-Dried Meals

Freeze-dried meals are a great option, as they're lightweight, satisfying, and fast to prepare at the end of a long day. Developed to be nutritionally balanced, they cover your body's needs across carbs, sugar, protein, and fats.

Simply boil water, add it to the pack, leave for 10 minutes – and the meal is ready to eat. This option does ultimately cost a little more than something prepared from scratch, but many consider the convenience worth the extra expense.

It can be difficult to predict how much water to add to your freeze-dried foods without



measuring utensils. A good tip is to take a drink bottle with measurements on the side, and follow the directions on the meal packet. Some people prefer to use a little less water initially and add more if they desire a thinner consistency. If you're eating straight from the packet, take a longer spoon or fork to stir with (so your hands don't become grubby from digging at the bottom of the packet!).

In regards to portions – if you normally have a big appetite, definitely opt for a regular size. After hours of trekking, no one wants to go to bed hungry!



Freeze-dried meals are a convenient and lightweight choice that makes food planning a little easier.

'Wet' Food Options

This option is not dehydrated nor freeze-dried; it's fresh and pre-cooked, packed wet into pouches. Essentially, they're 'retort' products – packaged the same way canned products are, but in a soft packet.

These products usually have 18-month 'best-before' dates as opposed to use-by dates – so even though the food quality degrades after 18 months, it is still safe to eat. Wet-pack food brands include Go Native and Offgrid Provisions.

For more on the pros and cons of wet-pack food, check out [this blog](#) too.

Dehydrating Food

Some people prefer to dehydrate their own homemade alternative to pre-packaged, freeze-dried meals.

Dehydrating food is cheaper than buying freeze-dried meals, and it's a great option when you want to add more texture and flavour to starchy meals. However, if taking this route, you need to plan and be organised well in advance.

Dehydrating reduces the volume and weight of your food, but requires a little extra water and time to allow the food to rehydrate. Plus, it has the tendency to be a little more on the chewy side once rehydrated.

For more on dehydrating your own food for hiking, check out this episode of the Snowys Camping Show:

Snacks

Keeping your body nourished as you hike is important for sustaining your energy. It's best to keep snacks in an accessible area, like the hip belt or side pockets of your pack, so you don't have to rummage through your rucksack to find them!

Snacks for the Trail

- Dried fruit, fruit bar, or fruit leather/straps
- Nuts and seeds
- Chocolate



- Nut butter
- Muesli bars
- Specialised protein or energy bars
- Energy gels
- Smoothies (Banana, Berry, or Iced Mocha)
- Instant pudding or custard
- Scroggin
- Lollies

For more info on what snacks to pack, check out [this blog](#) too!



Grazing throughout the hike is important to maintain your energy levels.

Condiments and Spices

Whilst almost anything will taste great after a long day, you'll be thanking yourself later for bringing along condiments and spices to enhance the flavour of your evening meal. Bring a selection of your favourites, so you don't tire of the same basic meal each day. If you're pre-packaging each meal into a Ziplock bag, add it ahead of time or carry it separately to flavour at the time of eating.

Condiments and Spices

- Curry powder
- Tomato paste
- Garlic and onion flakes
- Capers
- Olives
- Sundried tomatoes
- Parmesan cheese
- Chilli flakes
- Jam
- Honey, rice, or malt syrup
- Packet sauces (tomato, sriracha, soy, or tamari)
- Powdered sauces
- Hummus
- Tahini
- Salt and pepper



In the evenings, a sachet of hot chocolate or Milo can go down a treat before bed. Image:



Marmot

Beverages

Serious caffeine fiends would likely feel attached to their coffee machine at home! If the thought of granulated coffee touching your lips sends involuntary shivers up your spine, perhaps a portable coffee maker may be worth an extra 200-300g in your pack.

Not everyone is fussed about taste – so if this is you, just pack plenty of teabags, granulated coffee, or coffee bags for your morning caffeine kick.

During the day, a smoothie or hydration drink is nice to break up the monotony of plain water now and again, and in the evenings a sachet of hot chocolate or Milo can go down a treat before bed.

Beverages

- Instant coffee
- Powdered milk
- Teabags
- Electrolyte powder sachets or tablets
- Freeze-dried or powdered smoothies
- Hot chocolate sachets / Milo



Take along several different drinks to vary your fluid intake.

Ration Packs

So, if all that has sent your head spinning, or you just want to make things easy – Back Country Cuisine offers five all-inclusive packs. These include meals, snacks, treats, condiments, and beverages. They're available in the Classic, Adventure, Vegetarian, Outback, and – to cater for those with specific dietary requirements – the No Worries Ration Pack.

Top 5 Meal Planning Tips for Multi-Day Hikes

1. Ensure to give some of the meals a test run before you go, so you know you'll enjoy that well-earned feed at the end of the day!
2. Variety is important for longer trips. This helps to keep motivated and fuel your body for the entire trek.
3. For the super organised, use a spreadsheet to record your food (and gear). This way you can weigh and calculate the total weight, as well as how much energy you'll pack in per day.
4. If you're a big eater, try to find ways to cut down on weight in other areas of your pack so you can take more food with you.



5. Include options that don't need to be cooked, just in case your stove malfunctions or you drain your fuel.

Do you have any excellent tips for packing your food like a pro? Let us know in the comments below.