



As hikers we tend to spend our money and put our energy into the gear we will need for the hike. We will buy the best backpack, best trail shoes/boots, the latest lightweight tent, and stove but when it comes to food, I see a lot of hikers at camp sitting down to 2-minute noodles and continental pasta packs!

While this type of food is okay every now and again, the most important piece of equipment we should be investing in is our bodies! Why would you want the vehicle that is getting you along the track to not run at its best?

You need to fuel your body and keep it running at its optimum level because if it breaks down then you are off the trail. If your tent rips or your backpack breaks you can fix it and move on, but if your body breaks then your hiking trip is over.



Invest in your body by eating healthy food on the trail.

So, what can you do?

There are lots of things you can do to get your body in top gear. You can just be healthy in your day to day life, exercise and prepare your body by training. But, when on the trail, you want it to keep running well, so you can do that by feeding it healthy food.

Now I'm not a nutritionist, I haven't studied any form of this, I am just a mum, a long-time hiker, and someone who tries to maintain a healthy body.

I would suggest that if you are concerned with getting the appropriate nutrients for your body, or have special dietary requirements, to consult a health professional or nutritionist.



Healthy food will help keep your body in good condition.

Dehydrating food for hiking

Homemade dehydrated food is what I have personally tried and tested throughout my hiking life, and is what I'm keen to share with you all in this article.

Dehydrating meals is a great way to preserve your food for longer, as well as lighten the load of your pack. I try not to use prepacked foods where possible, however, sometimes it can be unavoidable especially if you're on the trail for a long time.



I've been testing out homemade dehydrated meals throughout the years.

How to use a food dehydrator

I am not going to go into step by step instructions on using your dehydrator, as this would be a whole book. But, I will share a few ideas to show you how easy it is. Dehydrating is so much fun and very addictive once you get started. You will find that you can dehydrate almost anything!

The most important thing you should remember is if it has fat it probably is NOT okay to dehydrate. This is because you can't dehydrate fats, they won't break down so they will turn rancid.



Once you get the hang of it, you'll find that dehydrating is quite fun.



How to dehydrate vegetables

When I'm hiking I crave vegetables, so I try to add as many vegetables into my dehydrated food as I can, even adding in veggies to my simple spaghetti bolognese.

Dehydrating vegetables is so easy to do and requires little to no preparation at all. Some do work better if you blanch first though, but for most, it doesn't matter. If you haven't got the choice of fresh vegetables then frozen works just as good, so there are no excuses for not getting your veg!

Tip: Be sure you cut up what you want to dehydrate into sizes no bigger than 1cm-1cm, any bigger and you'll find it just takes too long to dehydrate. Some dehydrators have a temperature control, so you'll find the soft vegetables are best to dehydrate at a lower temperature so they don't dry out too quickly and turn crispy. Unless you want to make veggie chips (*yum*) then crank it on up.



Whether it's for veggie chips, or for meals - vegetables are easy to dehydrate.

My favourite vegetables to dehydrate

- Snow peas
- Capsicum
- Grated carrot
- Zucchini
- Mushrooms
- Sweet potato (chips)



Mushrooms are one of my favourites to add to my trail meals.

To blanch or not to blanch?

What is blanching? Why blanch? Do you have to blanch or not? How do you blanch? These are good questions and I hope to shed a little bit of light on it for you.

What is blanching?

Blanching is a process of basically boiling or steaming the food for a short minute before plunging it into a bowl of icy water.



Once the moisture has been removed, the ingredients will be lighter and more compact.

Why should I blanch food before I dehydrate it?

Blanching vegetables will not only keep the rich colour of the food, but it can also remove any




grit, dirt and organisms from the surface. This process also will help destroy an enzyme in the food that can give off a bitter taste after you have dehydrated it.

The best thing is it also shortens the cooking time at camp which means you'll use less fuel and you'll get to eat your dinner quicker. The biggest reason people like to blanch is that it helps seal in the flavours and vitamins.

Now blanching is not necessary, it's down to personal preference. I find it helps keep the colour of the vegetables, and that some flavours are stronger if first blanched before dehydrating.

Which vegetables don't need blanching?

- Onions
- Mushrooms
- Capsicum 

Mushrooms are one of the veggies you don't need to blanch.

which vegetables can I blanch if I want to?

- Carrots
- Eggplant
- Peas
- Squash
- Broccoli
- Asparagus

You really should consider blanching vegetables if dehydrating raw, unless you want to make veggie chips... I personally don't.

- Potato
- Sweet potato



Broccoli is an ingredient you can blanch before putting into your dehydrator.

How to make veggie chips

I like to nibble on veggie chips whilst hiking and at camp... I use sweet potato and zucchini and carrots but you can be creative. With a peeler, I peel the veggies nice and thin then place onto the drying trays and dehydrate at the highest temp (70°C) for around 12 hours, turning over halfway.

When they are completely dehydrated they are crispy.

Try: adding salt and garlic powder to them before dehydrating for extra flavour.





Carrot chips are a delicious snack for the trail.

How to dehydrate fruit

I love fruit and I always buy an orange and a cucumber when I hit a town on a trail. The cucumber will last a few days and I munch away on it while walking. Cucumbers might not be full of calories, but they're high in vitamins and minerals and great for hydration. The orange is the same and really makes a nice change from drinking water all the time.

I, however, eat the orange a little differently. This is because I use it to help make a yummy cake for dessert at camp! That's right, I bake a cake at camp. It is such a treat and makes the other hikers jealous.



Slice some strawberries, dehydrate them and use them in your breakfasts on the trail.

Getting fruity

You can dehydrate all types of fruit to have as your snacks or even put into your meals. I often will have stewed fruit with custard at night or even for breakfast. You can add it to your cereal or oats, make fruit rolls, or even fruit chips.

Some fruits need to be treated first by using an acid-based fruit juice to help prevent it from turning brown. I squirt these fruits with either lemon or lime juice, but pineapple juice can work too.

Tip: do not slice your fruit too thick, this will make the drying process far too long, so slice thinly for better results.

Fruit that you should treat before dehydrating

- Apples
- Bananas
- Pears

If you don't have the fresh fruit you can use frozen ones. I often do this for my blueberries or raspberries. Don't be afraid to experiment and get creative as it is a lot of fun and so yummy when on the trail.



Pears will need to be treated with citrus juice before dehydrating.

How to make fruit roll ups

Even if you aren't hiking these make the best treats and it's a great healthy snack option. Get creative with what you make, I personally love the combo of watermelon and pear!

To make these you just blend all the fruit you want to use together into a puree, spread it evenly over your solid dehydrator tray and pop it into the dehydrator. If you don't have a solid tray or want more, then I use parchment paper onto my other trays, and it works just as



well.

When it is around halfway done you will begin to see that it starts to become leatherier. At this point, I peel it off and flip it over to help dry it evenly. Once it's complete, you can peel off and cut to size – ready to eat. Kids also love them, even the older ones!

Once they're completely cooled off, I recommend storing them in a sealed airtight container or a zip lock bag.

Other yummy fruit snacks

- Fruit chips (the same way I make veggie chips)
- Stew fruit with custard (dehydrate your favourite fruit and rehydrate with extra water and cook at camp till stewed).



Fruit chips are just as delicious as veggie chips!

Rice and pasta

Rice is one of the most popular and oldest grains used by mankind and a staple in the diet of most cultures. It's inexpensive, lightweight, extremely versatile and easy to cook.

Pasta and rice are a must for any hiker's pack as they're a great form of carbohydrate which will help you fuel your body, giving you the energy to keep going.

To pre-cook or not?

I tend to pre-cook my rice and pasta then put it in the dehydrator. Sounds silly I know, but it really does make the cooking time at camp a whole lot quicker which means you are using less water and less fuel – which is always a good thing!

Tip: You can get quick cooking rice from the supermarket, (this has been cooked then dehydrated) or pre-cooked rice from the supermarket that isn't dehydrated (this is heavier to carry, however).



Pre-cooking ingredients such as rice and pasta will save you time later on.

Ideas for rice and pasta

Whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner, it doesn't matter, rice and pasta make great options for hiking. I always have rice for my breakfast and throw in loads of dehydrated fruit and mixed nuts with a squirt of condensed milk. So yummy!

At night I like to have a stir-fry using lots of dehydrated vegetables, Italian pasta dishes loaded with mushrooms, vegetables and meat – which you can't go wrong with!



My favourite rice and pasta meals

- Creamy porcini pasta
- Vegetarian risotto
- Pesto pasta



A delicious Italian risotto goes down a treat after a long day of hiking.

Tips on how to dehydrate your own soup

The dehydrating process makes it easy for you to create and have your own homemade yummy soup on the trail. Whether it is a chicken or beef broth, veggie or noodle soup – you can have it all!

Tip: I sometimes grate my vegetables then dehydrate. Not only does the food dehydrate quicker, it also rehydrates quicker.

• Use less water

When I make a pot of my soup at home for the trail I use less water during the cooking process because this makes the soup more concentrated and easier for the dehydration process. Remember that when you do rehydrate your soup you can add as much water as you want. Once the soup is made, you then spread it over the solid drying trays.



Pumpkin soup is a recipe that's perfect for the colder months.

• Split it up into serving sizes

Tip: I put my serving size on each tray to make it easier to know how much to pack per meal. Spread as thinly as you can so the drying time is reduced, and I always just use my highest temperature (70°C), which can take around 10 – 12 hours, but this is very much depending on the type of soup you are dehydrating.

• Blend it into a puree first

For example, my pumpkin soup takes around 10 hours, (as I puree it first), where my chicken curry and vegetable takes 12 hours as there are chunky bits of vegetable and chicken in it.

Tip: Blending your soup to a puree is great for quick rehydrating and once your soup is dehydrated, put it back into the blender to blend into a fine powder.



A bowl of piping hot noodle soup is a yummy treat on a cold evening at camp.



• Only vacuum seal it when it's completely cool

Once the soup is dehydrated I then vacuum seal it.

Tip: Do not put your dehydrated food in any sealed container until it has completely cooled off because if you don't wait, this will create moisture (defeats the purpose of dehydrating) and will shorten the shelf life of your soups by causing it to turn bad. You can also store in a zip lock bag in a dry cool place like the pantry.

My favourite soup recipes for hiking

- Chicken curry and vegetable soup
- Chicken noodle soup
- Pumpkin curry soup



Warm up around camp with a hearty soup recipe.

How to dehydrate meat

When you first start to dehydrate meat, it can be a scary process as you don't want to end up sick on the trail. The main thing to remember is to make sure it is completely dehydrated and choose meats that are of a lean cut with little to no fat. Be sure to slice your meats small to help it dehydrate quicker.

I find that mincemeat works the best for dehydrating. On average, meat will take around 12 hours to dehydrate and I always do so at the higher temperature setting.

Tip: I place the food into my dehydrator right before bed so once you wake in the morning it is done and ready for storage.



Once you try it, you can get more confident dehydrating meat.

How do you know if the meat is fully dehydrated?

When it is fully dry it is like a pebble, and if you squeeze it, it's should feel hard not soft.

Storing your dehydrated meat

Storing your dehydrated meat correctly and safely will help your meat last. A safe guideline for you to go by would be to consume your dehydrated meat within the first 6 months, providing you store it correctly. I personally have gone longer, but that's a judgement call you need to make on your own.

Once you've completely dehydrated your meat then you need to store it in airtight containers. You can use ziplock bags or vacuum seal it for storage.

Tip: Be sure, before you handle the food, your hands are completely clean and free of any oils. I would recommend you use food safe gloves as well.



Store your dehydrated meat in a dark cool place like your pantry. Some people prefer to store in the freezer as they say it lasts longer. It is recommended before placing in the freezer to vacuum seal the meat first to avoid freezer burn. This is a personal choice, so it may take some experimentation to work out what works best for you



A hearty meal of rehydrated beef hotpot.

How to dehydrate your chicken or beef

You **MUST** cook your chicken/beef first! I use 75g of fresh chicken/beef mince per meal, but use the amount that suits you. I know some hikers I meet on the track say that they easily double that!

Tip: don't use oils when cooking.

Uncooked chicken/beef mince weight is around 75g and reduces to around 14g once dehydrated. Not bad!



Cook your mince before you dehydrate it, and then it's ready to add to your meal.

Beef

Beef is easier to rehydrate than chicken and offers more flexibility as you can put it in meals such as casseroles or stews, providing a hearty meal on the track that warms you up on cold and wet days.

Chicken

Unlike other meat, my experience dehydrating chicken has not always been successful, to say the least. Once dehydrated, the chicken will often become dry, stringy or chewy when rehydrated. I use chicken mince as it dehydrates quickly and re-hydrates back even quicker and is just as moist.



Chicken mince is best for dehydrating – then you can add it to a pasta or rice dish.

Dehydrating casseroles and stews

When I am cooking for the family dinner I will make extra and put the leftovers into the dehydrator overnight, so by the time I wake up in the morning, its ready to be packed away. This is the easiest method as you really are not adding any extra effort to your daily life, so there are no excuses to say 'I don't have time'.

Tip: be sure when you are preparing that you chop the ingredients, like the meat and vegetables, up small.

Just line your trays with parchment paper and spread out the food thinly. I like to do this in portion sizes so, it is easier when it comes to packing the food for my trip. Dehydrate on your highest setting (mine is 70°C) for a least 10-12 hours or until fully dehydrated. You will know when it is ready as it will be crunchy, but do let it completely cool off on the trays before you



pack it away.

To store, once it is completely cool, you can put into ziplock bags in serving size. I also mix with it some dehydrated rice or pasta to make my meal complete. If you own a vacuum sealer, you can place it into the bags and vacuum seal it but this is not necessary. The most important thing is to keep the moisture in the air from getting in as this is what will make it rancid.



Dehydrating leftover dinners saves you time later on.

How to make beef jerky

Jerky is the classic hiker snack and I will say I have never been a huge fan but on a longer hike, I tend to like it. My son loves it and so I let him loose in the kitchen and he creates some great marinades for his jerky.

Tip: marinate for at least 12 hrs before dehydrating. Put the dehydrator on at the highest temp, which will take around 12 hrs.

My favourite meat dishes

- Beef tacos
- Italian chicken risotto
- Chilli con carne
- Chicken laksa



One of my fave dishes to enjoy when hiking is chilli con carne.

How do you rehydrate it on the trail?

It is easy enough to rehydrate your food once at camp. Some will put their food in their pot on arrival with the required water on top, bring to boil then leave to soak while you set up camp. Others will rehydrate on a slow simmer, some will even cold soak but this only really works on oats and couscous.



There are a few methods for rehydrating your meal.

Now it's up to you to get creative with dehydrating food for your adventures

For more details on preparing meals for long distance hiking, as well as recipes for the trail then head to my site [here](#) for details on my upcoming book.

My biggest tip for you all is to be creative and have some fun creating the best dishes that will make every other hiker drooling with food envy.



We discuss dehydrating food even further on the Snowys Camping Show podcast, with Dr. Kate Grarock:

Do you dehydrate food for your bushwalking adventures? If so, what's your favourite trail meal?