

Do you often end up rushing around at the last minute to find some quick and easy food for your camping or hiking trip? For some simple camp food options, don't discount the idea of freeze-dried or dehydrated food too quickly, despite what you may have heard, the ingredients are real food, they usually taste pretty good, and they are easy to prepare. These options also have long shelf lives, require no refrigeration and are compact, so you could stock up ahead of time in preparation for that last-minute adventure. Below I've covered some of the quick, simple and lightweight options on the market today, as well as our top-rated meals that we sell at Snowys. These are collated based on the meals with the highest and most rating overall, and best feedback from those who have actually eaten them out in the field. But first, let's run you through the pros and cons of the lightweight options you have – so freeze-fried, dehydrated and wet pack food.

Last minute food for your trip can be sorted out quick smart. Image: Sea to Summit

Freeze-Dried meals

How are they made?

Freeze-dried meals are rapidly frozen, then crystals of frozen ice in the food are evaporated to water vapour in a vacuum chamber in a process called sublimation. This removes more moisture than dehydrating. The food is then heat-sealed into foil packages, the air is removed and replaced with nitrogen gas. These products have up to a 3-year shelf life.

Pros

- Water is quickly absorbed back into the food through pores left by the escaping ice crystals.
- Food is prepared with hot water and is quick (approx. 10 mins). Food does not shrink and retains much of its original shape, taste, texture and smell.
- Vitamins are retained in the food due to the low temperatures used when processing the food. Can be eaten without re-hydrating in an emergency.
- The freeze-dry process removes up to 98% of moisture from the product. On average, fruit contains up to 90% water, freeze-dried foods are therefore extremely lightweight.

Cons

- Even though the food has a title that makes it sound like a gourmet home cooked meal, and the taste is pretty good, it still has a consistency that is best eaten with a spoon.
- Extra water needs to be considered for food preparation, this is especially important when lightweight hiking.



Freeze-dried meals are light and packed with energy. Image: Campers Pantry

Dehydrated foods

How are they made?

Dehydrated food is produced by passing warm air over the food for a period of time, evaporating the moisture from the product. This is a similar process to sun-dried foods. For more on how to dehydrate your own food for hiking, read our guide [here](#). These products usually carry a 12-month shelf life.

Pros

- Can be done at home with relatively affordable equipment.
- Because the food shrivels, it is a better space-saving method for storing or transporting food than freeze-dried which retains much of its original shape.
- Generally less expensive than freeze-dried foods.
- Dehydrating food does not remove quite as much water as the freeze-drying method, but it is still a very lightweight option.

Cons

- Requires cooking/simmering to prepare, 10-20 mins in hot water.
- Because more heat is used in the drying process when compared to freeze-drying, it is believed that dehydrated food has a slightly lower nutritional value than freeze-dried foods.
- Can have a chewy texture when re-hydrated.
- Extra water needs to be considered to prepare food, this is especially important when lightweight hiking.



You can buy dehydrated food from the supermarket, or make your own. Image: Sea to Summit

Wet pack food

How is it made?

This camp food is not dehydrated or freeze-dried, it is fresh, pre-cooked food packed wet into pouches. The manufacturing process produces a “retort” product and is packaged the same way canned products are, only in a soft pouch. The retort packaging method involves cooking



at high temperatures to kill all microorganisms. These products usually have 18 months best-before dates, not a use-by-date. This means that food quality degrades after 18 months, but it is still safe to eat.

Pros

- Pouch is simply heated in a pot of boiling water.
- Requires less water for preparation, boiled water can be used for drinking or washing.
- Can be eaten cold.
- Has taste and consistency of home-cooked meals.

Cons

- Heavy for hiking, better suited for camping or kayaking.



Wet pack food is a little heavier than other options. Image: Go Native.

Now that we've run you through all the lightweight food options available, let's look at our top-rated meals in the category.

Top 10 Freeze-Dried Meals for Camping and Hiking:

1. Outdoor Gourmet Company Coq au Vin

5 stars

What the brand says:

A red wine-enriched chicken stew in the company of mushrooms and onions served with a side of herb mash potato. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"Delicious. We added a packet of dehydrated beans for extra veg. Also bought a 2-serve of potato but really didn't need it. Perhaps we should've walked further/faster..." Kirsten - Sydney

"I had three dehydrated meals, this one was by far the best. It has these little bits of green onion which when are rehydrated are even a little bit crunchy. Quite substantial too, the 2 size serve actually made me feel full after a day on the track". Simone - Brisbane City

"This little food packet delivers a surprisingly good tasting meal and is so easy to prepare." - Garry - Whyalla



A hearty and delicious chicken stew. Image: Australian Hiker

2. Back Country Cuisine Thai Chicken Curry

5 stars

What the brand says:

The distinctive Thai taste of coconut milk & curry with chicken, green beans and cashew nuts. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"Tasty with just the right amount of spice. One of the best Backcountry Cuisine meals you can get." Leonie - Kiama

"This is now my favourite Back Country Cuisine flavour. Served with a big bowl of mash it is delicious. I love the little crunchy pops of cashew. It seems to rehydrate a lot better than some of the beef and lamb dishes too. Very tasty with a nice bit of spice." Terrence - Alice Springs

"Nice and spicy. admittedly, I do like spice, so your mileage may vary with your spice tolerance. in my opinion, it could be spicier but I like spice!" Paul - Adelaide



This curry has just the right amount of spice. Image: Back Country Cuisine

3. Back Country Cuisine Cottage Pie

5 stars

What the brand says:

A homemade mix of savoury mince and warm vegetables topped off with a potato topping. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"This has to be my favourite Back Country meal. It tastes just like cottage pie. If I am extra hungry, I will add a little freeze-dried rice to the mince to bulk it up and some Edgell's potato flakes to the existing potato. Makes for a very filling meal. Sprinkle some Parmesan cheese on it and you have the perfect meal for cold nights hiking on the Central Plateau in Tasmania". Darren - Launceston

"I tried a couple of others but this was by far my favourite. I didn't worry about re-hydrating the mash separately, I just did it all in together. I love that you can seal it up while you wait but also that you can tear off the top when it's ready and use it as a bowl to eat right out of." Freya - Childers

"I mixed the potato in with the rest of the meal when I made it and it reminded me of a casserole. Delicious as always. I love the packaging and how you can tear it in half to make your own bowl - brilliant & saves dishes!" Britt - Perth



This cottage pie is hearty, rich and delicious. Image: Australian Hiker

4. Back Country Cuisine Chicken Tikka Masala

5 stars

What the brand says:

Popular Indian dish with tikka chicken and almonds in a mild spicy sauce served on rice.

Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"We had a few different flavours with us on a tough hike which were all pretty good but this one was legitimately amazing! Best thing after a long day hiking. I now keep a couple at work for when I get caught back after hours. Delicious!" Reen - Drouin

"So yummy! Not too salty or spicy. Will definitely order again!" Katya - Port Macquarie

"Very tasty, good consistency and not too salty. This one is coming with us again." Danielle - Kensington



Get your Indian food fix even on the trail. Image: Australian Hiker

5. Campers Pantry Cauliflower Pea Dahl

5 stars

What the brand says:

One of our most popular dishes. Delicious and spicy dahl curry with cauliflower florets and mixed vegetables.

What our customers say:

"This was amazing - had plenty of flavour and a lovely kick of spice. Perfect following a cold days hiking/camping." Jess - Nolane

"A lovely mix and totally comfort food with the spuds on the side and rice! Winning camper's pantry!" Brenzventures - Casuarina

"This would have to be my fave de-hydrated meal of all time! Tastes more like a real home cooked meal. Slightly spicy." Cindy - Battery Hill



Enjoy the flavour of a home cooked meal with the Cauliflower and Pea Dahl. Image: Campers Pantry

6. Back Country Cuisine Cooked Breakfast

4.5 stars

What the brand says:

A hearty combo of smokey beef, tomato, egg and a hash brown potato mix. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"Love this for Brekkie (or any meal). Always pack extra of this one." Mike - Sydney

"I wasn't expecting this to be so tasty!" Travin - Bundaberg Central

"I found this delicious and surprisingly filling for a big hiking day. The eggs and meat are simple, dehydrated and yummy. Everything has a tomato taste which I found added zing.

Don't add extra water, and make sure you mix the potato at the bottom well with the water. It is similar to Deb. I was hoping it would magically turn to Maccas hash browns but alas, still yummy!" Annie - Melbourne



This brekkie will fill you up any time of day. Image: Sea to Summit

7. Back Country Cuisine Mexican Chicken

4.5 stars

What the brand says:

Chicken, kidney beans and corn in a medium chilli sauce with Nacho chips on the side.

What our customers say:

"Quite a tasty Mexican flavour with a bit of a kick. Was impressed." Kyrian - Malaga

"This was the first time I had eaten rehydrated beans and they far exceeded my expectations. The nachos are a good addition too!" John - Newcastle East

"Nice mix of veggies and chicken, spice just right. We always carry small tortillas with us as a bread substitute when in the backcountry and it's great with those." Jellybean - Canberra



Texture, flavour and spice - this dish has it all. Image: Australian Hiker

8. Back Country Cuisine Pasta Vegetariano

4.5 stars

What the brand says:

Pasta, beans, tomatoes and olives in an Italian sauce for a hearty meal on a lightweight adventure.

What our customers say:

"This is a really nice meal. The beans and pasta make it a hearty dish for vegetarians." Wendy - Drouin

"So glad for the Vegetarian delight. It's yummy and very filling." CJ - Perth

"I always take this with me, good flavours, tasty, hearty meal." Ashton - Hobart



This flavour is packed with yummy protein. Image: Australian Hiker

9. Back Country Cuisine Roast Lamb and Vegies

4.5 stars

What the brand says:

Oven-baked lamb and mint gravy with vegetables and creamy mashed potato. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"Had never had a camp meal until I tried this one and was really impressed. Tasted pretty much like a pub meal, loved the mashed spud and the meat was really tender and flavourful." Aria - Heathcote

"The roast lamb and veggies is the best and tastiest of the Back Country Cuisine range in my opinion. I've tried several. I use them when I camp off my motorcycle as these are the easiest way to make a meal without having any washing up to do. Just boil some water." Barry - Redland Bay

"Certainly had the roast lamb taste... not quite like our own farm-bred prime lamb but when cold/snowing in March last week 1200m up on plateau central Tasmania... was like the best hot food in the world! Plus no dishes to wash." Heather - Padthaway





The closest you'll get to a homestyle meal out in the bush. Image: Australian Hiker

10. Outdoor Gourmet Company Beef Bourguignon

4 stars □□□□

What the brand says:

A rustic beef stew with aromatic vegetables, herbs and spices, finished with a densely flavoured dark and silky sauce. Gluten-free.

What our customers say:

"Surprised at how good these meals are and the Beef Bourguignon is great as well - so easy!" Anne - Eltham

"One of my favourites, in a word 'yummo!' Don't be turned off that it is Gluten Free as that certainly does not detract from the flavour at all" Janeane - Canberra

"Great taste, great price and so quick and easy to prepare after a long day in the outback." Kuuee - Victoria



This flavourful French classic will warm you up on a cold night. Image: Outdoor Gourmet Company

Freeze-dried options for special dietary requirements:

For those who have dietary requirements, there are definitely options for you out there.

Vegan freeze-dried options

- [BCC Mushroom Bolognese](#)
- [BCC Pasta Vegetariano](#)

Vegetarian freeze-dried options

- [BCC Vegetarian Stirfry](#)
- [Campers Pantry Balti Vegetable Curry](#)
- [BCC Nasi Goreng](#)
- [Campers Pantry Cauliflower Pea Dahl](#)
- [Campers Pantry Vegetarian Pasta](#)

Gluten-free freeze-dried options

- [BCC Thai Chicken Curry](#)
- [BCC Nasi Goreng](#)



- [BCC Sweet and Sour Lamb](#)
- [BCC Cooked Breakfast](#)
- [BCC Classic Beef Curry](#)
- [BCC Mexican Chicken](#)
- [BCC Honey Soy Chicken](#)
- [BCC Beef Teriyaki](#)

What do you prefer to eat when you're camping and hiking?