

Reheat and reinvigorate your meals with these microwave tips

Whether you're reheating leftovers or cooking a meal in your microwave, you can keep food tasting fresh with these simple tips.

Last summer, I lived through a kitchen renovation, which meant my husband and I could only cook with a microwave. Now, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, some of us are turning to these trusty countertop (or overhead) helpers for quick lunches during the work day and comforting late-night snacks.



Don't get me wrong. Microwaves are great. They're fast and space-saving and there are plenty of healthy food options a microwave can handle. Still, they aren't perfect. Reheating leftovers or making dishes in the microwave can result in dry, rubbery or flavorless food. Here are a few ways to avoid microwave mishaps and keep your food tasting fresh.

Store your leftovers well



If you're concerned about how well leftovers will reheat, be sure to store them well in the first place. Tightly wrap or contain foods you store in the refrigerator to keep moisture as locked in as possible. (Here's how you can help keep food items fresh in your fridge even before you cook them.)

Pick the right container

Any time you use a microwave, it's important to use microwave-safe containers. Most paper, glass and ceramic containers are safe to use in microwave ovens, since the actual microwaves pass through them. Some plastic containers are microwave-safe, but many will melt and shouldn't be used.

Metal pans should not be used in a microwave. The microwaves that pass through the safe containers are reflected off of these materials. That can cause damage to your microwave and ruin your food. Check the bottom of the container and your microwave's instructions to decide which items are safe for your model.

Aluminum foil is another no-no. The thin sheets of metal can overheat rapidly and even ignite.

Choose the right reheating method

If you're working with a food that needs to be crispy (think fries, egg rolls or fried foods), skip the microwave and use a toaster oven or the broiler function on your full-size oven. There's really no good way to reheat crispy foods in a microwave. You'll get a soggy mess every time.

For a less intense reheating in your microwave, try lowering your microwave's power settings. Many microwaves have power levels ranging from 1 to 10 or from 10% to 100%. Somewhere around 60% is a good place to start for a gentler approach.

Arrange food for even cooking

When cooking or reheating food in the microwave, make sure it's arranged so that it heats evenly. A big mound of mac and cheese or mashed potatoes is likely to have a cool center. Arranging foods in a single layer helps the

heat distribute more evenly.

If you're reheating different types of food, heat them according to their specific needs. A piece of bread like a bun or roll won't need as much time as something denser like meat or a thick side item, though you might want to slice that roll in half if you want it to warm evenly.



Add moisture

If what you're making is traditionally cooked in water or steamed, like pasta, rice or vegetables, adding extra moisture can keep the dish tasting fresh. Cover the dish (or wrap the food, like that bread roll) with a damp paper towel or hand towel.

You can also add a few tablespoons of water to the dish and cover it with a microwave-safe lid or plastic wrap, or place a second dish on top. The extra water, contained, will create steam in the microwave and quickly revamp your dish.

Keep an eye on it

Defrost, Reheat and even the popcorn button are helpful microwave features that can quickly ruin food if not monitored. If you're using one of these special functions, it's important to keep an eye and ear on your food.

While it cooks, watch for excessive steam and listen for too much crackling. If you're microwaving for multiple minutes, stop in the middle and stir things up. This will help the food heat evenly.

Next time you get ready to throw that meat-and-three plate in the microwave, take a little extra time to try these tips. You might be surprised what a difference it can make. For more ingenious cooking tricks, check out out these five tips for better BBQ, the best way to cook Instant Pot rice and how to start cooking healthy meals at home.

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