

3 Day Backpacking Menu

There are times on backpacking trips when I simply cannot eat enough food in a day to keep up with my body's caloric demands. This is a big issue for me on days where I want to hike more than 15 miles and there are a few mountains in the way. When planning the contents of my food bag for such trips, there are two primary variables that I juggle: caloric density and variety.

Caloric density is the ratio between caloric value and weight. I try to make sure that the bulk of foods that I pack provide at least 100 calories per oz by weight. Some sample foods that fit the bill are: cookies, chocolate, roasted almonds, trail mix, olive oil, protein powder, hot sausage, [Nutella Hazelnut Spread](#), hard cheese, nut butters, graham crackers, cheesits, and so forth. Caloric density is important because I shoot for 1.5 lbs of food per day, rather than the often prescribed 2 lbs, in order to keep my pack light.

The second essential attribute of my food bag is variety. I like to jazz it up by having lots of different things to eat, so eating is something to anticipate. Boring food puts me off and I won't eat it. That's bad because I have to eat to stay alert and motivated. Don't underestimate the importance of variety.

When packing food for a trip, I don't pay much attention to figuring out the proportions of protein, carbs, and fat when I pack, because its just works out if you eat of variety of food. The one thing I do calculate are calories, and I shoot for 3,000-4,000 per day. I also always pack about 500-1000 extra calories per trip in case I need to walk late on my last day or even spend an extra night out.

Here's a sample 3 day backpacking menu from my last trip, [a 44 mile section hike](#) on the Vermont Appalachian Trail.

<u>Day 1</u>		
Breakfast	Breakfast at Home/Car	800
Snack One	Trail Mix (Nuts & Berries)	300
Snack Two	Ginger Cookies	400
Lunch	Nutella on Wheat Bread	740
Snack Three	Beef Jerky and Milk Chocolate	530
Dinner	Boil-in-Bag Rice and Eggplant Punjab	740
	Total Calories	3510

<u>Day 2</u>		
Breakfast	Granola, Milk Chocolate, Protein Powder, Tea	1070
Snack One	Trail Mix (Nuts & Berries)	300
Snack Two	Ginger Cookies	400
Lunch	1/2 Wheel Gouda Cheese and Wheat Thins	650
Snack Three	Licorice, Almonds	700
Dinner	Tuna in Olive Oil, Cytomax , Almonds	790
	Total Calories	3910

Day 3

Breakfast	Granola, Milk Chocolate, Protein Powder, Tea	1070
Snack One	Trail Mix (Nuts & Berries)	300
Snack Two	Ginger Cookies	400
Lunch	1/2 Wheel Gouda Cheese and Wheat Thins	650
Snack Three	Licorice, Almonds	700
	Total Calories	3120
	<u>Extra Food Bag Contents</u>	
	2 x Cliff Bars	480
	Almonds	340

On this latest multi-day trip, I experimented with eating a larger breakfast than normal, front loading my caloric content for the day, since I often tend to do my highest mileage of the day before 2 PM. In addition to my normal double serving of granola with hot water, I added chunk milk chocolate for fast energy, and vanilla-flavored, whey powdered protein for alertness and longer lasting energy. This worked well and helped eliminate the sluggish feeling I often feel in mornings during the first hour of walking.

After breakfast, I normally eat two snacks before lunch: the first after about 2 hours, and the second about an hour later. The point of these is to sustain a high energy level.

During lunch, I try to consume around 600-800 calories in the form of carbohydrates and fat. On shorter trips, I'll eat two pre-made Nutella and Wheat sandwiches on day one because they're rather heavy, or 1/2 a small wheel of hard cheese and 3 servings of Wheat Thins on subsequent days because hard cheese preserved in wax keeps rather well, even in hot weather. Lunch carries me through to another afternoon snack, which I eat a few hours before dinner.

Since I like to go to sleep around sundown, I start making dinner as soon as my camp chores are done, such as setting up my shelter and getting fresh water. Like lunch, I try to keep this meal simple to make. On day one of a trip, I'll cook a heavy Indian boil-in-the bag meal with rice, but on other nights I'll make a freezer bag meal like Annie's Mac'n'Cheese. The purpose of dinner is more about muscle and nutrient recovery than walking energy, so it doesn't have to be your largest meal of the day.