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## Microwave Cooking

### Tasty food, healthy food in less time

Microwave ovens are common in many homes and are a bonus addition to the cooking process. When they first came on the market they were fairly basic and were found to be quite handy for making hot drinks and heating pre-cooked meals. Although it was claimed to be an alternative to the conventional oven, pastries and the like were disappointing and ended up rubbery. Later improvements, however, changed all of that.

There are still limitations, especially with regard to certain things that shouldn't be put in the cabinet such as metal containers; but by using microwave-safe bowls and dishes there is very little that can't be "nuked". The beauty is that when used in tandem with oven-baking, frying etcetera, vegetables in particular are not only quick and easy to cook; but they are done in such a way that, once the main dish is nearly ready for the plates, the vegies can be quickly re-heated in minutes so everything is hot when served.

The microwave process heats the water content in food and this must be remembered if re-heating something like pre-cooked meat as it is fairly dry. The answer is simple – place the food in a container with a little water, cover with a lid and pop it in to heat on low to medium for a few minutes. Fresh meat such as beef, pork and chicken can also be microwaved in the same way; with a little water, of course. The real advantage of the microwave for me, however, is its use for cooking vegetables, start to finish, with no more need for boiling the full taste and nutrition out of carrots, beans, sprouts and cauliflower in a pan on the stove top.

Enough of the waffle - let's cut to the chase. Here's an example of a meal we had the other day. The meat was sliced roast turkey bought as a meat-end from the deli. It just needed re-heating in the fan-forced oven when the plates went in for warming; this once the vegies were almost ready. A couple of potatoes were peeled, cubed, put in a deep microwave tub with a lid and just barely covered with water. The spuds were intended for mashing and went in the nuke first to be cooked on the 800 watt setting for 7 minutes. While this was happening, the other vegies were being sorted.

In another container, also with a little water in the bottom, I put two large lumps of cauliflower and a peeled, sliced carrot. There were also two florets of broccoli to go in the same container; but that would wait until the carrot and cauli were partially cooked. These went in after the potatoes had finished, nuked on the same temperature (800w) for 4 minutes. It was then time to drain the potatoes and mash them in the tub they'd been cooked in. I added a shake of salt and pepper, plus a little skim milk to make them creamy. Then the lid went back on and they were set aside for re-heating later.

I like gravy, so I had blended the powder with enough water in a sauce pan and added

some fresh chopped rosemary for extra flavouring. While the microwave was doing its bit, I heated and stirred the gravy until it had thickened, then turned off the gas and left the pan on the hob. Like the potato mash, it would wait until everything else was ready. That didn't take long. As soon as the cauli and carrot had finished their first spin, I popped in the broccoli and returned the container to the nuke for a further 3 minutes on 800w. All that remained to do was to put the plates with the sliced turkey in the fan-forced oven on low.

While they were warming there was ample time to give the three vegies a final go on 400 watts for 4 minutes, just to heat and finish them off. While these were spinning, the gravy was being re-heated. As soon as the cauli, carrot and broccoli were ready, the potato mash went back in for 2½ minutes on 400w. Almost done: out came the plates and the vegies were arranged alongside the turkey. The mash and gravy were the lucky last; and, bingo: two serves of roast turkey with vegies and gravy, everything hot and tasty in just over 20 minutes.

Big deal, some might say. Maybe it's a bit quicker, but surely vegies cook better on the stove top the old fashioned way? Actually, boiling in water takes out much of the nutritious qualities and a fair bit of the taste; and the meal I described above would likely use at least three pans; whereas the microwave took two plastic ones that are easily washed up. And bear this in mind – by cooking an extra serve or two of meals, these can be frozen for de-frosting later and re-heated; where else but in the nuke! How convenient is that?

If you have concerns over safety issues, specifically regarding leaking microwaves which are known to be harmful; provided the appliance is cleaned and maintained on a regular basis as per the manufacturer's instructions there's no problem. The inside of the cabinet and glass can be wiped with a sponge or cloth dampened with plain water, paying special attention to the door seal – so much easier than cleaning a gas or electric oven. One other thing – ensure containers used have a vent or loosely-fitting cover to let the steam escape; otherwise you'll wind up with exploded splatter all over the inside of the nuke.

My advice is to give the microwave oven a go. It makes the resident cook's life less of a hassle; and those who eat the proceeds will be having healthy nutritious meals, half of which isn't going cold by the time it makes it to the table. Also check out other easy-cook dishes in Handy Hints > Cooking using a Microwave.

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