



NEWS RELEASE

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Fast meal solutions from your slow cooker

*By Kay Blakley,
DeCA home economist*

FORT LEE, Va. – If you're lucky enough to come from a family where dinner was well underway when everyone arrived home from work or school, you probably have fond memories closely tied to delicious aromas. That scenario may be rare in most households today, but you can create almost the same scene with just a bit of advanced planning and the help of your slow cooker.

Almost any food purchased at the commissary and prepared at home offers the advantage of better nutrition at a lower cost. Plus, the hassle of getting everyone to the table at serving time will be a thing of the past. The inviting aroma of a slow-cooked delight will take care of that! Keep the ingredients few and simple to ensure they go together in a flash. All the recipes featured here fit those requirements.

Slow cooker cooking is pretty basic. Be sure to follow any special instructions pertaining to your specific model, and follow these general guidelines:

- **High temperature or low?** It's always best to use the heat setting that a recipe recommends, but if you need it done in a shorter or longer amount of time, use the general guideline that 1 hour on high is equivalent to 2 to 2 1/2 hours on low. If your recipe calls for 8 to 10 hours on low heat, cook it on high instead, for 4 to 5 hours.
- **Keep the lid on or off?** Nearly all recipes are cooked with the lid on, so keep it covered unless instructed to do otherwise. Don't be tempted to peek, either. Each time you remove the cover adds another 15 to 20 minutes to the total cooking time.

- **How full to fill the pot:** For best results, a slow cooker should be between 1/2 and 3/4 full.
- **Other good-to-know tips:** Vegetables like potatoes and carrots take longer to cook, so slice or cut them into small pieces, and place them in the bottom of the pot.
- **For safety reasons, always brown and drain ground meats before adding to the slow cooker.** Browning other meats and poultry isn't necessary, but adds to flavor and appearance, especially with beef.
- **Use dried leaf herbs instead of ground** – their flavor holds up better over the extended cooking time.

Remember to make the commissary your source for your slow-cooker ingredients at great prices. To check out the recipes mentioned here and more, come to Kay's Kitchen at <http://www.commissaries.com>.

Cranberry Roast Pork (Serves 8 to 10)

Ingredients:

1 3-pound boneless pork top loin roast
 1 tablespoon cooking oil
 Salt and ground black pepper
 1 16-ounce can whole cranberry sauce
 1/2 cup cranberry juice
 1/4 cup sugar
 1 teaspoon dry mustard
 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
 2 tablespoons cornstarch
 2 tablespoons cold water

Directions:

1. In a 10-inch skillet, cook roast in hot oil over medium heat until browned on all sides.
2. Place roast in a 4-to-5-quart slow cooker; sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper.
3. In a medium bowl, stir together cranberry sauce, cranberry juice, sugar, mustard and cloves.
4. Pour over roast. Cover and cook on low-heat setting for 6 to 7 hours or on high setting for 3 to 3 1/2 hours.
5. Using tongs, transfer roast to a platter; keep warm.
6. Skim fat from juices in slow cooker. Measure 2 cups juices; transfer to a medium saucepan.
7. In a small bowl, stir together cornstarch and water; add to saucepan.
8. Cook and stir over medium heat until thickened and bubbly; cook and stir 2 minutes more.
9. Serve sauce with roast. Round out meal with rice pilaf and a green vegetable, if desired.

Nutrient analysis: *Per serving: 404 calories; 11 g. total fat (3 g. sat fat); 100 mg. cholesterol; 124 mg. sodium; 38 g. carbohydrate; 1 g. fiber; 37 g. protein.*

Salsa Swiss Steak (Serves 6)

Ingredients:

2 pounds boneless beef top round steak, cut 1 inch thick
1 to 2 large red and/or green sweet peppers, seeded and cut into bite-size strips
1 medium onion, sliced
1 (10.75-ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom soup
1 cup bottled salsa
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon dry mustard

Directions:

1. Trim fat from steak. Cut steak into six serving-size pieces.
2. In a 3 1/2 –to-4-quart slow cooker, place steak, sweet peppers and onion.
3. In a medium bowl, stir together soup, salsa, flour and mustard. Pour over steak and vegetables in slow cooker.
4. Cover and cook on low-heat setting for 9 to 10 hours, or on high-setting for 4 1/2 to 5 hours.
5. Serve with mashed potatoes and cornbread, if desired.

Nutrient analysis: *Per serving: 251 calories; 6 g. total fat (2 g. sat fat); 65 mg. cholesterol; 574 mg sodium; 10 g. carbohydrate; 1 g. fiber; 37 g. protein.*

Overnight Oatmeal (Serves 8)

Outdo your local fast food joint any day of the week with this easy recipe for great breakfast oatmeal. Be sure to use the “steel cut oats” called for. Don’t substitute regular rolled oats, because their cooking time is much less.

Ingredients:

8 cups water
2 cups steel-cut oats (see note above)
1/3 cup dried cranberries
1/3 cup dried apricots, chopped
1/4 teaspoon salt, or to taste

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a 5-to-6-quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on low-heat setting until oats are tender and creamy, 7 to 8 hours.
2. Serve hot with milk to drizzle on top.

Nutrient analysis: *Per 1-cup serving: 193 calories; 3 g. fat, 0 g. sat. fat; 0 g. cholesterol; 34 g. carbohydrate; 6 g. protein; 9 g. fiber; 77 g. sodium.*

Slow-Cooked Beans (Makes 6 cups)

Ingredients:

1 pound dried beans, such as cannellini beans, black beans, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, great northern beans or pinto beans
1 onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 bay leaf
5 cups boiling water
1/2 teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. Soak beans in enough cold water to cover by 2 inches for 6 hours or overnight. Or, use the quick soak method. Place beans in a large pot with enough water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat and let stand for 1 hour.
2. Drain the beans and place them in the slow cooker. Add onion, thyme and bay leaf. Pour in boiling water.
3. Cover and cook on high-heat until beans are tender, 2 to 3 1/2 hours.
4. Add salt, cover and cook for 15 minutes more.

Nutrient analysis: *Per 1-cup serving: 260 calories; 1 g. fat; 0 g. sat. fat; 0 mg. cholesterol; 48 g. carbohydrate; 15 g. protein; 19 g. fiber; 201 mg. sodium.*

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth more than \$4,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*