

Pack, Cook, Eat!

How to plan kayak-camping meals that nourish and satisfy

By Karen Bertram & Bill Brackin

Introduction

Eating well while on a multi-day trip means getting both the nutrition your physical body needs and the satisfaction your mind wants. You need both in order to fully enjoy a multi-day trip.

Here we're going to cover three topics about how to eat well on a multi-day sea kayaking trip:

- Understanding what your whole body needs
- Making a meal plan
- Packing the essential kitchen gear

Whole Body Nutrition

Before we started sea kayaking, much of our outdoor recreation time was spent hiking and backpacking. These are physically and mentally demanding activities, and in my (Karen's) 20s and 30s my body wanted up to 3,000 calories to walk 8 miles with a 35-pound pack.

Paddling a sea kayak for 8 miles in relatively calm conditions doesn't require that much fuel, but still, at my current age and weight, my body wants about 2,000 calories a day. That's 65% more than what it wants to just hang out. That 'hang-out' rate is called your basal metabolic rate.

Know your basal metabolic rate

This is the number of calories your body uses to carry out its basic functions. Three factors come into play: your body size and type, your gender, and your age. Once you know what your own rate is, you can combine that with an estimate for how many calories an activity like kayaking requires, and with these two data points you can determine whether the food you're eating will give you enough fuel.

Here are a few online resources for roughly calculating your own basal metabolic rate.

- <https://www.active.com/fitness/calculators/bmr>
- <https://www.garnethealth.org/news/basal-metabolic-rate-calculator>
- <https://www.verywellfit.com/what-is-bmr-or-basal-metabolic-rate-3495380>

Using these calculators, Karen's body needs between 1,300-1,700 calories/day assuming some physical activity like taking a walk or gardening. However, the [Mayo Clinic website](#) said I need 1,900 calories a day, and 2,200 calories if I'm engaged in vigorous exercise.



Feed your mind too!

After a day's workout it always feels good to eat a hearty meal. Your mind wants this as much as your physical body. So don't skimp on bringing food that you like to eat and definitely do not use a kayak-camping vacation to try and lose weight. If you sacrifice too much of what you consider to be tasty, satisfying food—especially if you're out for a week or more—this taxes your whole body. The trick is finding a way to pack, prepare, and eat the food you like in an outdoor environment.

Making a Meal Plan

Many of us go to the grocery store without a list, but when it comes to planning meals for a multi-day trip, making a plan is a must.



Here's what you want to think about:

- How much food (and water) to take
- Whether to group-cook
- How much effort you want to put into food prep and cleanup
- What kind of food for your body and mind want to be at their best

Water

For the sake of simplicity, go with the 1 gallon/water per day rule of thumb. Until you've gone on a week-long trip, you can't really know whether you need less or more than that. You probably don't need more. My experience is that I end up using some of the water for washing up. A warm face bath feels mighty good after a day on salt water.

You do not need to carry water to wash dishes. We'll talk about the 3-bucket system when we get to kitchen gear.



Homemade or Premade?

Homemade food requires preparation, but it has two advantages:

- Your body might perform better with foods it's used to
- It's less expensive

On the flip side, premade foods are easy to prepare and nowadays there are many good options to choose from. Below are some from Bill's list. (Contact Bill for the more comprehensive list.)

Company	Website
AlpineAire	https://katadyngroup.com/us/en
Backpacker's Pantry	https://backpackerspantry.com
FirePot	https://www.firepotfood.com
Food for the Sole	https://www.foodforthesole.com
Good To-Go	https://goodto-go.com
Heather's Choice	https://heatherschoice.com
Mountain House	https://mountainhouse.com
Nomad Nutrition	https://www.nomadnutrition.co/
OvaEasy (eggs)	https://ovaeasy.com
Patagonia Provisions	https://patagoniaprovisions.com
Peak Refuel	https://peakrefuel.com
Trailtopia	https://trailtopia.com

Sample meal plans

Here are two meal plans that give you ideas for how to make your own. Remember to always pack extra food, at least enough for one day. You may get held up and need it, or someone else might need it.



Karen's meal plan for a 5-day trip

This plan assumes I'm driving to the launch site on day 1 and starting to paddle by 11:00 am. The weather forecast calls for some sun and showers, and temps will be in the mid-60s to mid-70s. I'll eat a good breakfast with protein and either eat lunch before I embark or boost with a power/breakfast bar.

This meal plan suits me because I like:

- A hearty breakfast
- Cooking and I don't mind the cleanup
- Getting a good amount of vegetables
- Plant protein over meat protein
- De-emphasizing wheat-based carbs

Day/Mileage	Breakfast	Lunch/Snacks	Dinner	Treats
1 / 9 nm	(On the road)	Hearty sandwich, ½ apple, oatmeal cookie, power bar	Chili, corn tortillas	Hot chocolate
2 / 14 nm	Scrambled egg and sauteed veggie tortilla, coffee	Nut butter and jam in flour tortilla, ½ apple, power bar	Pasta with white beans and kale, salad	Warm chocolate pudding
3 / 10 nm	Oatmeal with nuts and dried fruits, orange, coffee	Crackers, cheese, jerky, ½ apple, oatmeal cookie, power bar	Corned beef hash, salad	Chocolate
4 / 15 nm	Corned beef hash (leftovers), orange, coffee	Nut butter and jam in flour tortilla, ½ apple and cheese stick, power bar	Ramen with extra veggies and tofu	Hot chocolate
5 / 8 nm	Scrambled egg and sauteed veggie tortilla, coffee	Crackers, cheese, jerky, ½ apple, oatmeal cookie, power bar	(On the road)	The last crumbly cookie
Extra day / foul day	Oatmeal with nuts and dried fruits, orange, coffee	Whatever's left!	Tasty Bite Bombay Potatoes, basmati rice	Chocolate



Bill's vegan meal plan for a 6-day trip

This plan works for Bill because:

- Lightweight and compact
- Provides enough calories and nutrition
- Lunch can be eaten as snacks on the water
- Leftovers from lunch become a backup in case of delay
- Sealed food doesn't attract critters
- Satisfying

Day/Mileage	Breakfast	Lunch/Snacks	Dinner	Calories
1 / 5.5 mi.	On the Road & Ferry	Nut & Seed Blend 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Miso Soup Butternut Dal Bhat Mucho Mango Tea	2,025
2 / 9.2 mi.	Instant Coffee Coconut Milk Creamer Coconut Mango Macadamia Energy Oats	Freeze Dried Apple Slices 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Noodle Cup-a-Soup Red Bean Chili Swiss Miss Hot Chocolate	2,190
3 / 15.3 mi.	Instant Coffee Coconut Milk Creamer Red Raspberry Organic Breakfast Grains	Freeze Dried Peach Slices 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Asparagus Cup-a-Soup Mushroom Risotto Vanilla Pudding Hot Tea	2,154
4 / 11.2 mi.	Instant Coffee Coconut Milk Creamer Hash Browns w/Dried Peppers & TVP	2 Flour Tortillas Peanut Butter 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Potato Leek Cup-a-Soup Roasted Sweet Potatoes w/Kale and Quinoa Arizona Ice Tea	2,585
5 / 14.9 mi.	Instant Coffee Coconut Milk Creamer Blueberry Banana Crunch Energy Oats	Mixed Nuts Energy Blend 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Miso Soup Pad Thai Hot Tea	2,155
6 / 18.2 mi.	Instant Coffee Coconut Milk Creamer Cinnamon Cherry Crisp 2 Instant Oatmeal Packs	Dry Roasted Edamame 4 Food Bars Sports Beans	Miso Soup Spanish Paella Mucho Mango Tea	2,240



Make a list of staples

Here are the lists of foods Karen and Bill always take on a trip. Make your own list and store it with your camping gear so you always remember to bring it.

Karen	Bill
Butter	Vegan Butter
Cooking oil (Canola or Safflower)	Canola Oil
S&P	S&P, Herb mixes
Sugar	Cajun Fish Fry
Herbamere	OvaEasy Egg Mix
Flour	Assorted Tea Bags
Powdered milk	Small Squirt Bottles of Tea Mix
Eggs (farm fresh, unwashed)	Instant Coffee
Instant miso soup	Hot Cocoa Mix
Coffee/tea/hot cocoa mix	Sugar,
Breakfast/power bars	Instant Miso Soup, Cup-a-Soup
Peanut butter	Flour Tortillas
Jam	Shredded Cabbage
Oatmeal	Shredded Vegan Cheese
Flour tortillas	Peanut Butter
Nuun tablets	Nuun Nablets
One package Ramen	Nuts, Dried Fruits

Cooking Gear

Here are the essentials. The starred items are things you can share with others.

- ☐ Two stoves, windscreen, and fuel *
- ☐ Pots and pans *
- ☐ Boil bags (if eating my own dehydrated food)
- ☐ Knife and cutting board
- ☐ Plate, bowl, insulated cup, utensils
- ☐ Garbage bags *
- ☐ Critter-proof storage containers
- ☐ Food hanging system *
- ☐ 3-bucket wash system with soap & bleach *
- ☐ Camp suds, scour pads, dish towel
- ☐ Clothesline, clothes pins, mesh bags
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Extra bags, foil
- ☐ Tarp *
- ☐ Containers to hold water



Stoves

There are numerous types of stoves to choose from. Here are some things to consider:

- What foods you plan to cook
- Transportation restrictions on flammable fuels
- Need to re-fuel mid-trip
- Safety
- Weight and space
- What everyone else is using. You may want to share fuel, and having the same type of stove provides backup in case one fails.

Check out the following table for a list of popular stoves and their features.

Model	Fuel	Notes
MSR DragonFly and WhisperLite	White gas, kerosene, automobile gas, ISObutane, practically any flammable liquids	Fuel options, good heat control (Dragonfly), compact, reusable containers, very stable (Dragonfly)
Coleman Duel Fuel 533	White gas or unleaded auto gas	Fuel options, good heat control, compact, reusable containers, very stable
Solo, Toaks, Trangia	Denatured Alcohol	Lightweight and compact, safest fuel and available in most drug stores, reusable containers
MSR PocketRocket	ISObutane	Lightweight and compact, good 2 nd stove for backup
Jetboil, MSR	ISObutane	Lightweight and compact, very efficient, good heat control (Mo series), integrated windscreen, recyclable fuel canister



3-Bucket wash system

This system has become very popular because it works with saltwater as well as freshwater, and it allows you to sanitize your dishes without boiling water. Sea to Summit makes soft, compressible “sinks” that are easy to pack. You can definitely share this item on your gear list.

Here are the steps:

1. Take dirty dishes to the water and rinse to remove big bits.
2. Fill the first bucket with water and add camp suds.
3. Fill the second bucket with water for rinsing.
4. Fill the third bucket with water and add a few drops of bleach. This is your sanitizing bucket.
5. Wash dishes, rinse, and then dip in the sanitizing bucket.



A handy recipe for granola bars

Almost everyone packs some kind of snack bar when they kayak. Here's a recipe NSSKA member Julia Schiemer found at: <https://minimalistbaker.com/healthy-5-ingredient-granola-bars/>

This recipe is a winner by itself, but here's my tweaked version:

1 cup chopped Medjool dates, pits removed and coarsely chopped
1/2 cup unsweetened dried cranberries
Dash salt or kelp powder
1/8 cup maple syrup
1/4 cup honey
1/4 cup almond butter (or peanut butter)
1 cup chopped almonds (the lightly salted ones from CB's Nuts)
1-1/2 cups oats, toasted in a 350° oven for 10-15 minutes

I put the dates, cranberries, salt, almonds and toasted oats in the food processor and whizz it until the bits are roughly equal size. Then I add the warmed-up syrup/butter mixture and whizz some more. You want the mixture to stick together. If it falls apart, heat up a bit more syrup/butter or add a teaspoon or two of safflower or canola oil.

Put the glob into an 8x8 pan lined with a piece of parchment or wax paper. I use a flat-bottomed mug or jar to help get an even thickness in the pan.

That's it! Let it cool down, cut into snack-size pieces, and wrap and store in the fridge. You could add or use other kinds of seeds, nuts and dried fruit.

Happy Kayak Camping!

