

Food for the Road!

By Katy Wilkens, MS, RD

[Note: All of the recipes highlighted in yellow below can be found in our recipe section.](#)

How to save money on healthy car snacks, so there is more money to put in your gas tank!

You can't do much about the price of gas when you travel, but you can save a ton of money on the price of food by planning ahead and using a few simple tricks!

"Take along" food saves you lots of time, money, and tastes better than "take-out" food, too! Not only will you save a lot of money, which may help you offset the increase in gas prices, you will have a *better* vacation, because you'll be stopping because you want to, to see interesting sites, rather than stopping because you have to, at yet another ubiquitous fast food place to fill up on grease burgers!

Planning ahead for your road trip will also save you time! You can breeze right by those crowded fast food strip malls and make it to your destination faster, more rested and well fueled.

"Mom, this is Borrrring..."

One of the main reasons people eat on long car trips is because they are bored! So, in addition to the following treats, try to plan some fun car games (go back to your own childhood here). Look for license plates from around the country; play "I Spy," or even "Catch Phrase".

For older children, (and yourself), stock up on "books on tape" at the library. You can listen to books you could never get your kids to read at home, and classics like "Treasure Island" or "Kidnapped" will keep the whole family entertained for hundreds of miles! And they keep those minds (instead of "mouths") busy! If you are driving by yourself, these books on tape are a great way to keep yourself awake!

Keep it cool!

One good idea to think about for your car is a way to keep food cold. Once you have this solved, a whole new world of your own, healthy, 'fast' food opens up. There are lots of choices, starting with small coolers, just big enough for a six-pack, to refrigerated bags, or soft coolers, that keep food chilled for hours. There are even 'mini' refrigerators that run off your car's lighter plug. Whatever way works best for your car, once you have a way to keep food chilled, you are miles ahead of fast food strip malls! Try freezing some of the foods you put in your cooler; they will slowly thaw and keep thing colder longer. For example, those tubes of yogurt can be frozen and then and then eaten when thawed; they double as an ice pack for the cooler.

Not your average grease burger?

So, how do you replace the drive-thru's typical meal of burger, fries and soda?

Burgers are easy to hold in the car, but they are full of saturated fat and salt (two of life's killers). Instead, think of wraps. Use a lettuce leaf or a rice wrapper. You can wrap them around "Chicken Salad" or try Peanut butter and banana in a corn tortilla. Hummus and pita bread is a great snack; or you can make pita sandwiches with mozzarella cheese, favorite veggies like red peppers, and tuna. Or, try our recipe for healthy "Speedy Wraps" that you can fix ahead. Try our "Quick Chix Nuggets." Make them ahead and serve them chilled with

one of the dips below. When given the choice, you and your fellow travelers will prefer the non-burger options!

It's the Crunch!

If you think that carrot sticks aren't a good option to replace fries, think again! All you need is a "special sauce," (See our recipes for "Buttermilk Herb Ranch" or "Joyce's Quick Dip") Try keeping the dip in small individual containers, that way, everyone in the car can double-dip to their heart's content. Save and recycle your old yoghurt containers for this, and you can dump the used ones at the next rest stop. Try broadening your idea of "dipp-able veggies." Carrots and celery are fine, but so are pea pods, radishes, sweet red pepper strips, or Jicama. All have the crunch of French fries, but less fat, salt & calories, and they don't have to be hot to be good.

Stop to Shop!

While you are driving, keep your eye out for local produce stands, or roadside farmers stalls. When you stop, ask for the local 'in-season specialty". In the south you might get to try boiled peanuts, tree ripened peaches might be the treat in the west, berries in the north, or Muscat grapes in the east.

Make your trip an adventure in eating, not just the same stuff you can get down the street at home. If you can stop at a "U-pick" place, even for 10 minutes, you children will develop a whole new respect for peaches, cherries, or berries, if they fill a bucket of their own.

If you need to make a 'food" stop, stretch your legs and hit up the local grocery store. You'll have fun looking at new brands and kinds of food you've never heard of. On a recent trip we stopped at a local store and found 4 types of Hispanic fresh cheeses we'd never tried before! All went right into the car cooler for snacking on the next few days.

Skip the Chips!

Instead of salty, oily chips, try homemade popcorn. Not the microwaved full-of-butter brand, but low-fat homemade microwave popcorn that has been juiced-up with flavor (See our recipe for "Brown Bag Popcorn" with lots of seasoning ideas, or use and air popper. Don't just make one kind, try making a big bowl of popcorn, and then divide it into fourths. Flavor each one differently, and put into many small bags – this way your passengers don't get (here's that word again), bored.....Or try making our recipe for "Almond Pecan Carmel Corn."

Nuts!

Another healthy crunchy snack that can be satisfying are nuts. Instead of salt encrusted nuts, try making your own flavored ones ahead. Put them in individual baggies, or let the kids make their own trail mix ahead, adding nuts to oatmeal, choc chips, dried cranberries or bananas; then everyone gets their own favorites! Try our recipes for "Minted nuts" or "Spiced Nuts." "No Bake Peanut Butter Balls" will keep well in the cooler, and can be made weeks ahead and frozen.

Water, water, everywhere....

Replacing the soda in the typical drive-thru meal can be easy. Think flavored waters, (the sour flavors will quench your thirst better), or UHT packaged milk, (which doesn't have to be refrigerated, although it will be more refreshing if it is). But for a special treat, make up a thermos of our "Homemade Lemonade" or for a tarter drink, try strawberry or "Rhubarb Lemondade." For something even more special, try a fruit drink called a Lassi. A "Lassi" is a flavored milk/fruit/yoghurt drink that is made in a blender. They travel well in a chilled thermos. Try tart fruits like apricot, peach, mango, or kiwi, which quench your thirst more.

Other easy treats:

Other ideas are to take individual cartons of yoghurt, and small bags of your favorite granola. Sprinkle the granola over the top and dig in with a spoon, and you have a nutritious, healthy, and satisfying treat. String cheese carries well, and eating it can entertain kids for quite a while. Home made muffins can be baked ahead and frozen, they'll keep fresh several days, or try our recipe for Anytime Energy Bars, which can be made weeks ahead. .

Save time, save money, save your health!

The truth is, all of the above is healthier, far cheaper, and more fun than the fast food options, whether your outing is to the zoo or a long road trip to visit grandma. With gas a record prices, you want to cut costs for your trip, but you don't want to cut out fun, or your health!

Spending a little time before your road trip, stocking up on 'take along' food, can save you dollars to put into your gas tank, and build meaningful (and healthy) memories for your travel mates and you!