



By Alice Henneman, MS, RD, UNL Extension Educator

Think of how often you could use already-browned and ready-to-go ground beef “crumbles” in recipes such as soups and sauces. Here’s how to make your own and keep them frozen for ready access!

## Make-Ahead Frozen Beef “Crumbles”

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Ground beef may be browned ahead of time and frozen for quick and convenient use in spaghetti sauce, chili, sloppy joes, etc. Follow these tips for best flavor and quality.



1. When making beef crumbles for later use, if possible, avoid using iron or aluminum cooking utensils as these speed flavor changes.
2. Brown crumbles with onions or unroasted bell peppers which have antioxidant properties and slow flavor changes. OR, brown the meat, seasoned lightly, with one or more of these herbs and spices that have antioxidant properties: rosemary, sage, marjoram, thyme, mace, allspice and cloves. Use the seasoning and amount that will be most suitable for the recipes you make. Add more seasoning when you prepare the food, if needed, as freezing may affect the intensity of the flavor of spices and herbs.
3. Do not use salt; add salt later when the meat is used in your recipe. Salt may hasten undesirable flavor changes in beef crumbles.
4. Freezing the crumbles as part of a sauce, such as spaghetti sauce, also helps preserve flavor. Make sure the sauce covers the entire meat surface.
5. Cool and refrigerate beef crumbles promptly in shallow containers. Containers may be placed in the refrigerator before beef has cooled entirely. Loosely cover refrigerated container until beef has cooled.
6. Promptly transfer the cooled beef crumbles to plastic “freezer” NOT “storage” bags. Eliminate air pockets. Freezer bags are thicker than storage bags and will keep the food fresh longer. Label and date packages; include amount of beef or number of servings.
7. Speed freezing and hasten thawing by freezing crumbles in a thinner, flattened shape in freezer bags. Do not stack packages—the quality will be better if the beef freezes faster. A rounded shape takes longer to thaw through to the middle. Flattened packages also will stack better in your freezer. Place on a flat surface, such as a metal pan or cookie sheet until frozen. Then, remove and stack.
8. Use frozen beef crumbles within 2 to 3 months for best flavor and quality. Freeze at 0 degrees F or lower.

**IMPORTANT:** Unless you plan to use beef crumbles within a day or two, freeze crumbles promptly after cooling for best quality and safety. If stored in the refrigerator for a day or two, transfer to a tightly covered container after they have cooled.

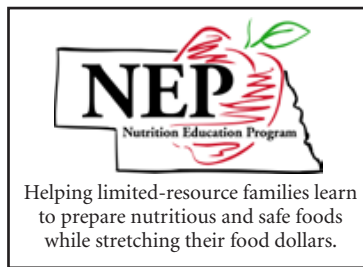
### BASIC DIRECTIONS

Use 90 percent lean and higher ground beef for these directions; 16 ounces raw ground beef yields equal to 12 ounces fully cooked ground beef crumbles.

1. In general, brown no more than 1 pound of ground beef at a time. As ground beef browns, some meat juices are released. If you overload the skillet, moisture is trapped and meat is steamed rather than browned.
2. Brown lean ground beef in large nonstick skillet over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is not pink, breaking beef up into 3/4-inch crumbles. Remove beef with slotted spoon.
3. Add one or more of the antioxidant foods and spices listed in number 2 under “Tips for Success” above to the beef as it is browning to aid in flavor retention during freezing.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Information provided in part by the National Cattleman’s Beef Association on behalf of The Beef Checkoff.

## Lifelong Learning in Nutrition



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The gift of good health is probably most appreciated as we get older. Eating healthy is an important part of maintaining good health. Approximately 100 seniors learn about healthy foods in monthly nutrition classes presented by the Nutrition Education Program in Lancaster County. Senior sites include Mahoney Manor, Burke Plaza and Crossroads House, all Lincoln Housing Authority residential living sites and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program at the Lincoln Indian Center.

Seniors learn practical, research-based nutrition information through discussion and interactive activities. To help them prepare tasty foods from the commodity products they receive, they also enjoy food preparation demonstrations and sampling recipes. These older adults learn about healthy food

choices from MyPyramid, meal planning, stretching food dollars, keeping food safe and food preparation among other topics.

Good nutrition is important at any age, but especially for seniors who may have health-related challenges. A nutrient-rich diet, which is a diet high in nutrients and low in calories, can help individuals stay independent for a longer time. Some nutrition concerns particularly important for older adults include:

- Heart-healthy foods
- Low-sodium diets
- Adequate fiber consumption
- Keeping hydrated (drinking water)
- Cooking for 1 or 2
- Eating a variety of foods

Many seniors feel better eating smaller meals and snacks throughout the day rather than 2 or 3 larger meals. Staying active is also very important to good health. One senior, who attended one of the classes commented, “The nutrition classes are fun and have inspired me to eat a better variety of vegetables. It is easy to get in the habit of eating the same thing when I am cooking for myself.”

The following recipe from the Nutrition Education Program calendar is delicious, yet easy to make for breakfast or snack and adds milk, fruit and protein to the diet. It works well to peel, slice and freeze the banana in a sandwich bag ahead of time.

## Peanut Butter Banana Shake

(1 serving)

- 1 cup low-fat or fat-free milk
- 1 banana (fresh or frozen)
- 1 tablespoon creamy peanut butter
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract



Combine ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. Serve immediately.

### VARIATIONS:

- Add 2-3 ice cubes if using a fresh banana.
- Use low-fat chocolate milk to replace the milk.

*Nutrition Facts per Serving: 300 calories, 11 g fat (17% DV), 3.5 g saturated fat (16% DV), 10 mg cholesterol (4% DV), 190 mg sodium (8% DV), 42 g total carbohydrates (14% DV), 4 g fiber (16% DV), 28 g sugar, 14 g protein, vitamin A 10%, vitamin C 15%, calcium 30%, iron 4%*

## Are You a “Lark” or an “Owl”? Cook Ahead Accordingly!

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When it comes to sleep patterns, “lark” is a term often given to people who like to get up early. An “owl” is someone who likes to stay up late. While a lark may be ready for bed by 10 p.m., an owl may wish the day started at 10 a.m.

What does this have to do with cooking?

Perhaps you’re a night owl and can barely drag out of bed in the morning, let alone fix breakfast. Do as much as

possible the night before when you have a full tank of energy. For example:

- Mix any frozen juice.
- Set the table, get out the cereal, perhaps measure the coffee.
- Round up any utensils needed for cooking breakfast.
- Unload the dishwasher so it’s ready to use the next day.

On the other hand, if you’re a lark, your energy tank may already be low by dinnertime. Do some dinner preparations earlier in the day. For example:

- Unload the dishwasher in the morning.

- Measure ingredients needed for the evening meal. Store perishable ones, covered, in the refrigerator. Cover and store nonperishable ones, in your prep area on the kitchen counter. For example, if you’re cubing meat for kabobs, cut it in the morning. Likewise, peppers for kabobs may be cut (and refrigerated) earlier in the day.
- Many homemade salad dressings can be mixed in the morning.
- Prepare a dessert for the evening meal.

## Play “FOOD” Ball Online!

How much does your family know about eating healthy according to MyPyramid recommendations? Test your knowledge by playing “FOOD”Ball, an interactive online activity online at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/ftn-d06.shtml>

“FOOD”Ball has 4 quarters, with 3 plays each (a total of 12 questions). Will you fumble, drop the ball or go straight for the touchdown each time?

