

Lesson Six - Ground Beef Meals

Ground beef recipes are a mainstay of many family meals. So many different meals can be made with ground beef. The recipe in this lesson can be used for meatballs, meatloaf and some variations.

In this lesson, the girls will learn to:

- Practice safe handling and storage of raw meat
- Make meatballs or meatloaf
- Use a master recipe with variations
- Use a meat thermometer

Review:

- Oven Safety (Lesson 2)
- Abbreviations: C, T, t. (Lesson 3)

Give each girl a copy of:

- Before I Cook Ground Beef
- Meatball-Meatloaf Master Recipe
- Menu Magic with Meatballs Skill Page

Read **“Before I Cook Ground Beef”** and the recipe page. Decide if you want to make meatballs or a meatloaf with your group. The same recipe works very well for either one, but meatballs bake much more quickly and every girl will have ample opportunity to shape them.

As you look at the recipe together, tell the girls the same **master recipe** can be used to make four different meals. To save time, efficient homemakers could double or triple the recipe, make meatballs, meatloaf and one of the variations, and then freeze some for later use.

This lesson provides a great opportunity for a field trip to the **meat department** at your local grocery store. Introduce yourself to the meat manager. They are usually glad to help consumers and often have helpful handouts and recipes. Familiarize yourself with the various types of ground beef in your store.

Have you ever tasted meatballs with the consistency of hockey pucks? I must admit; I've made a few like that myself in the past! I prefer melt-in-your-mouth, tender meatballs and meatloaf. The **fat content of the ground meat** you use is one of the main factors determining whether your meatball will be dry and hard, or juicy and tender.



The girls cook ground beef in an electric frying pan while others work at the stove.

For meatballs, meatloaf and hamburgers, I like to use ground chuck because it has the best flavor. However, because it has a high fat content, I sometimes select a leaner ground beef, or mix a pound of lean with the ground chuck. Some people like to mix ground pork or ground turkey with ground beef. Experiment first to see what your family prefers. For this lesson, **I recommend ground beef with 10%-20% fat content.** Check the label for fat content.

When **handling raw meat**, I like to wear latex gloves. You can purchase a box of 50 at Wal-Mart or most pharmacies. I prefer the powder-free type to avoid getting powder on clothes. I find that many girls have never touched raw meat and they may not want to! A little encouragement and wearing gloves has overcome squeamish objections. As soon as the girls finish handling the raw meat, have them peel off the gloves, discard immediately, and **wash their hands.** All surfaces that may have come in contact with raw meat (including faucet handles, countertop, sink, etc.) must be washed with hot, soapy water. I find it easiest to use an anti-bacterial kitchen spray with paper towels that can be discarded after use.

There is more information on **food safety** in the Student Page, “Before I Cook Ground Beef”. Safe food handling is so important and can’t be emphasized enough! Food-borne illnesses are common. We often assume we have a mild case of flu when, in fact, we may have gotten sick from bacteria in our own kitchen. I tell my classes to handle all raw meat as though it contains harmful bacteria. Then we are sure to practice safe food handling.

Our **Master Mix recipe** makes tender, juicy meatballs or meatloaf. In fact, it’s so tender, I don’t recommend it for hamburgers because they tend to fall apart when you flip them.

Many ingredients, like dry bread crumbs, oatmeal, and cracker crumbs, have been added to meatball and meatloaf recipes as **meat extenders.** While this may be helpful if meat is expensive, these ingredients tend to produce a dry meatball because they absorb too much moisture from the meat.

The **soft white bread** soaked with **milk** in our recipe, gives the cooked meat a creamy, moist texture. Do not use dry bread or crumbs. The soft bread (crusts removed) should be torn or cut into small cubes. Pour the milk onto the bread to soak all of it.

Let’s look at some of the **other ingredients** in our recipe. **Ketchup** and **mustard** add flavor. Use any type of prepared mustard (in a jar) that you like. I use plain yellow mustard, as many girls do not like the spicier varieties.

Worcestershire sauce (pronounced “worster shire”) is a mixture of soy sauce, molasses, vinegar, lime, onion, garlic and other seasonings. The British developed it in India and it was first bottled in Worcestershire, England; hence it’s name. It adds great flavor to meat, stews and other dishes. You should find it in the condiment aisle.

Italian seasoning is a mixture of herbs often used in Italian cooking. Brands vary, but it usually contains oregano, basil, and perhaps thyme, onion and garlic. It’s best to purchase a blend of herbs without salt. Salt is cheap, but when added to herb blends, you are paying much more for salt than you would if you purchase it separately. You also have more control over how much salt you add to a recipe when you measure herbs and salt separately.

For more information on herbs & seasonings, see Lesson Seven.
--

Cooking meatballs: People often fry meatballs because that creates a crisp crust. You can fry them if you wish in a small amount of oil in a frying pan. However, baking them is easy and quick, and clean-up is a breeze! Be sure to use a **pan with sides** all the way around to catch the juices. I use a cookie sheet, more properly called a “jelly roll pan” because it has 1” sides. A true cookie sheet is flat on three sides to aid in removing the cookies and is not suitable for baking meatballs.

In my class, we make one batch of meatballs. I ask each girl to measure a different ingredient and all take turns mixing the meat and then shaping several meatballs. You could divide the recipe in half – a good math exercise for the girls – and have the girls work in two small groups to make the meatballs, rather than one large group activity.

While the meatballs are baking, have the girls **clean up** the kitchen. Set out plates and utensils for everyone to taste the meatballs (or meatloaf).

You can **serve** just the meatballs with ketchup and other condiments on the side. Or, serve them in sub rolls or with pasta. Angel hair pasta, or thin spaghetti cooks quickly. For my group, I cooked pasta ahead of time, put it in the refrigerator, then warmed it in the microwave just before the meatballs came out of the oven. I warmed canned spaghetti sauce and let the girls help themselves.

To save time, when I make this recipe for my own use, I double it and make 50-60 meatballs at once and freeze them. See the **Skill Page “Menu Magic with Meatballs”** for lots of **serving ideas**.

After eating and cleaning up, ask the girls what they would serve with spaghetti and meatballs to round out the dinner menu. Help them make nutritious choices that vary in color, temperature and texture.

In Lesson Nine, the girls will plan and write dinner menus. But, in this lesson, introduce the concept of menu planning and “brainstorm” some menu ideas. This is another way homemakers use their creativity to plan attractive, tasty meals!

In **Extending the Lesson**, you’ll find tips to streamline meal preparation and a **Saucy Ground Beef Master Recipe** that can be used to make six different meals. Use these for future lessons. Ground beef is economical and the girls need to know a variety of ways to prepare it so they can make dinner for their family.

What you’ll need for this lesson:

Ingredients: (per recipe/batch)

2 ½ pounds ground beef
4-6 slices soft white bread
½ Cup ketchup
2 Tablespoons mustard
3 Tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 ½ teaspoons Italian seasoning
¾ Cup milk
Salt & pepper

Supplies:

Latex or plastic disposable gloves
Foil
Baking pan or sheet with edges to catch meat juices
Large Mixing Bowl
Measuring Cup
Measuring Spoons
Cutting Board
Paring knife or steak knife (to cut off bread crusts)
Small pitcher for milk (so girls don’t measure from a heavy gallon jug)
Hot Pads
Meat Thermometer
Kitchen Timer

To serve:

Plates
Knives, forks, spoons
Napkins
Salt, Pepper
Condiments
Paper cups or glasses
Milk or juice to drink
Optional: Pasta or sub rolls, spaghetti sauce, butter, Parmesan cheese

Name:

Before I Cook Ground Beef

We enjoy ground beef in so many ways: hamburgers, meatballs, meatloaf, sloppy joes, in casseroles, tacos, chili or on pizza. It's an economical meat, easy to prepare, and versatile. So, let's learn more about it.

Ground beef is usually made from the less tender, popular cuts of beef cattle. After cutting steaks, roasts and other cuts of beef, the butcher uses up leftover pieces by grinding them and packaging them in what we call "hamburger" or ground beef.

The next time you are in the grocery store, look at all the types of meat and you will notice that there are even **different types of ground beef**. You may see some labeled ground chuck, round, sirloin, extra lean, and perhaps some other names.

Look closer at the labels and you'll notice the **fat content varies greatly**. Regular ground beef may contain close to 30% fat, while ground sirloin is closer to 10% fat content. Why is this important? Consider the price, taste, and your nutritional needs. Leaner meat is more expensive; look at the price per pound. Meat with a higher fat content tastes better and is juicier. But it also shrinks more when it is cooked. Many people try to limit the amount of fat in their diet because fats contribute to heart disease.

The leanest ground beef will work well if you plan to fry it loose and use it in casseroles, tacos, as a pizza topping or for sloppy joes. But, if you are cooking hamburgers, meatballs or meatloaf and want them to turn out juicy, then choose ground beef with a little more fat in it. When in doubt, talk to the butcher in your store.

When **grocery shopping**, buy meat last and get it home and into the refrigerator or freezer as soon as possible. Be sure the package is not torn or leaking. Place meat in a plastic bag if possible and keep meat juices from coming in contact with anything else.

The USDA suggests that **ground beef be either cooked or frozen within 2 days after purchase**. Keep meat in the coldest part of the refrigerator, at 40 degrees or below. If you freeze the meat, store it in freezer bags or tightly wrapped in heavy-duty foil or freezer paper. Label it with the date. Raw frozen ground beef should be used within 4 months.



Aimee mixes the ground beef with other ingredients for meatballs.

It is always important to practice **safe food handling**, but this is especially true when cooking ground meat. Bacteria is everywhere in our environment. When meat is ground, it is exposed to more bacteria than a single cut of meat. Illness-causing bacteria such as E. coli and salmonella, are just two that may be present in raw meat. You cannot see or smell these bacteria, and freezing the meat does not kill them.

Bacteria in raw meat can contaminate your hands, cutting boards and other surfaces in the kitchen, as well as other foods. **To avoid this “cross-contamination”** wash your hands with soap and hot water before and after handling ground beef. Don’t reuse any packaging materials that contained raw meat. Use soap and hot water to wash all utensils, dishes and surfaces that have come in contact with raw meat. Use paper towels and throw them away after wiping up meat juices.

You may like to use **latex or plastic gloves** while handling meat and throw them away as soon as you are done. You still need to wash your hands, but raw meat will not get under your nails.

Thorough cooking destroys harmful bacteria. To be sure all bacteria are destroyed, cook meatloaf, meatballs, hamburgers and casseroles to **160 degrees**. **Check with a meat thermometer.** The USDA recommends not tasting or eating any undercooked ground beef.



There are different types of meat thermometers. Every kitchen needs one! It is not reliable to judge doneness by the color of the meat. To be certain food is cooked enough to kill all harmful bacteria, you must use a meat thermometer.

Practicing safe food handling will soon become second nature, and will help keep you and your family healthy.

Name:

Meatball-Meatloaf Master Recipe

Ingredients:

4 – 6 slices of soft white bread
2 ½ pounds ground beef
½ Cup ketchup
2 Tablespoons mustard
3 Tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 ½ teaspoons Italian seasoning
½ teaspoon salt
Dash of pepper
¾ Cup milk



Shaping a meatball

Method:

Yield: About 20 small meatballs

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line with foil: 9” x 13” pan, or a cookie sheet that has edges around it to catch meat juices.
2. Cut the crusts off the **bread**, then cut bread into cubes. Set bread cubes aside.
3. Put the **ground beef** in a large bowl.
4. Put the **ketchup, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, Italian seasoning, salt** and **pepper** into the bowl with the meat.
5. Place the **bread cubes** on top of everything. Pour the **milk** onto the **bread**.
6. Mix thoroughly with you hands to evenly distribute all of the ingredients.
7. Take a small handful of meat (about 1/3 Cup) and shape into a ball. Place the meatballs on the pan close together (but not touching) in rows so they fit in the pan.
8. Bake for about 20 minutes or until done. **Ask an adult to help** remove meatballs from the oven.
9. Remove meatballs from the pan with a slotted spoon. Caution: The meat juices are hot!



To make meatloaf: Pat the meat mixture into a foil-lined loaf pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 ¼ hours or until meat is done (160 degrees internal temperature).

Variations:

Stuffed Tomatoes: Cut the top off a tomato; scoop out the insides. Fill with meat mixture. Set in a baking pan and bake till done (about 20-30 minutes depending on size). Top with cheese if desired.

Stuffed Green Peppers: Slice green peppers in half; scoop out seeds and ribs. Fill with meat mixture. Set in a baking pan and bake till done (about 20-30 minutes depending on size).

Name:

Menu Magic with Meatballs

Meatballs... We automatically think of spaghetti. That's yummy, but let's avoid menu monotony and get creative with our meal planning. Meatballs mix well with many different flavors. They can easily be made in quantity - especially if you bake them - and they freeze well. Simply thaw as many cooked meatballs as you need for a meal, then try some of the following serving ideas to add variety to your dinner menus.

Meatball Subs: Place several hot meatballs in a sub roll. Add warm spaghetti sauce or pizza sauce. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

Sweet & Sour Meatballs: Heat meatballs with a jar of sweet and sour sauce. Serve over rice. Sprinkle Chinese noodles on top.

Meatballs Alfredo: Heat meatballs with bottled Alfredo sauce. Serve over cooked noodles. Add sliced mushrooms if desired.

Barbecue Meatballs: Heat meatballs with canned pork and beans. Add any of the following: ketchup, onions, brown sugar, bottled barbecue sauce, cooked corn.

Mexican Meatballs: Heat meatballs with a jar of your favorite salsa. Serve with rice, cornbread or refried beans.

Meatball Stew: Place meatballs in a large saucepan. Add one package of frozen vegetables for stew (carrots, potatoes, celery, onion). Add beef stock or consommé to cover (or use instant beef bouillon diluted in water according to package directions). Cover and simmer gently just until veggies are cooked. Dissolve 2 T. cornstarch in $\frac{1}{4}$ C. water and stir into stew to thicken. Add more cornstarch (dissolved in a little water) if needed to achieve desired consistency.

Make-A-Face: This is a favorite! On an empty plate, let your child create a face using meatball eyes, plain, cooked spaghetti for hair, a radish or grape nose, and strips of cheese to form the mouth. Set out a variety of sliced veggies to make earrings, a necklace, and other embellishments. Have butter, Parmesan cheese or spaghetti sauce to add to your creations.

Meatball Wild Rice Casserole: Prepare one 6 oz. package of long grain and wild rice mix according to package directions. Stir in one can cream of mushroom soup, ½ Cup sour cream and ½ Cup milk (adjust amount of milk to reach desired consistency). Stir in cooked rice and add cooked meatballs. Bake, covered, at 350 degrees until heated through.

Porcupines: Before baking, roll the raw meatballs in crushed corn flakes, then bake. For extra crunch and bacon flavor, sprinkle several tablespoons of bacon bits into the cornflakes.

Hidden Crunch Meatballs: Press half of a water chestnut into the center of raw meatballs. Close the meat around it and bake.

Fruity Meatballs: Press a chunk of pineapple or a small piece of apple into the center of the raw meatballs. Close the meat around it and bake.

Mini-Meatballs: When making meatballs, shape some the size of cherry tomatoes (these will bake in 10-15 minutes). Place warm, cooked mini-meatballs in a serving dish. Put several dipping sauces nearby: Ranch dressing, Italian dressing, soy sauce, pizza sauce, whatever are your favorites. Use toothpicks to skewer meatballs and dip into sauce. This makes a delicious appetizer.

Meatball Mac & Cheese: Add mini-meatballs to macaroni and cheese.

Meatball Soup: Add mini-meatballs to vegetable soup. Or, add them to beef broth and simmer with alphabet macaroni and some finely chopped vegetables.

Meatball BLT Salad: Mix cold, cooked mini-meatballs with lettuce, sliced tomatoes and cooked, crumbled bacon. Serve with your favorite dressing.

*Can you think of other ways to serve meatballs?
Write them here ...*

Extending The Lesson ... Making Meals Efficiently

Future Christian Homemakers Teacher's Notes

When we think of efficiency experts, we probably think of business people. What about efficient homemakers? Many skills are needed to be a homemaker. Because we must eat several times a day, meal planning and preparation take a good deal of our time, energy, and finances. Learning to make meals efficiently will reap big savings in all three areas – and enhance the health of our families.



Meal planning need not be a dreaded chore! In fact, it can be a fun way to use your creativity. The Skill Page, “Menu Magic with Meatballs” lists over a dozen ways to serve the same basic meal item. By baking a large batch of meatballs at one time and freezing them, you’ll have the main ingredient for many meals at your fingertips. It will only take a short time to complete one of the meals in that list, and your family will enjoy the variety.

One of the most efficient ways to work is to batch similar tasks and do them at one time. This is true when you cook. Whether you’re cooking chicken, round steak, or ground beef, look for a basic recipe that works well for a variety of different meals. Make a double or triple batch, then freeze in meal-size portions for your family. In doing so, you’ll create your own “fast food”.

Consider the many savings. When you bake one meatloaf, it hardly fills your oven. Why not mix a bigger batch of the same recipe and cook two or three meatloaves and a pan full of meatballs all at the same time, and then freeze them? You’ll run the oven one time, and clean up only once. But you can have half a dozen meals, or more, from one cooking session.

The secret to cooking efficiently is to use a master recipe and work with one type of meat at a time. I take a few hours one day to make all my ground beef meals, and, on another day I make some favorite chicken recipes. I freeze enough for one meal in a zippered freezer bag, then squeeze out all the air so it takes only a little room in the freezer. You’ll be surprised how much you can stack in the freezer when you store food this way.

It’s so important to encourage the girls you teach to enjoy planning and preparing meals. They will assimilate your attitudes about this and other homemaking tasks. Help them discover joy and creativity in serving their families.

The Meatball-Meatloaf Master Recipe gives you several ways to cook ground beef, but there are many more. In future lessons, try some of the recipes on the next page.

For best results, *cooked* ground beef may be kept frozen 2-3 months. Keep your freezer at 0 degrees or below. For more information, go to www.beef.org.

Saucy Ground Beef Master Recipe

Ingredients:

1½ pounds ground beef
½ Cup diced onion
1/3 Cup diced green pepper or thinly sliced celery, optional
1 (15 ounce) can tomato sauce
1 teaspoon Italian herb seasoning
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
Salt & Pepper to taste
Dash of chili powder, optional

Method:

In a large non-stick skillet, fry the ground beef, onion and green pepper or celery, until thoroughly cooked. Drain meat mixture in a sieve or colander and discard meat juices. Return meat to skillet. Add seasonings and just enough tomato sauce for the intended recipe. Stir over low heat until heated through. This recipe can easily be multiplied and freezes well.

Use this to make:

Sloppy Joes: Adjust the amount of tomato sauce to achieve the consistency you prefer. Serve on buns.

Spanish Rice: Add Saucy Ground Beef to 2 – 4 Cups of cooked rice. Stir in 2 Cups cooked corn. Add more tomato sauce if needed to moisten all ingredients. Put in a greased casserole dish. Top with shredded cheese if desired. Bake, covered, at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until heated through.

Taco or Burrito Filling: In the master recipe, decrease the tomato sauce by half, so there's enough to coat the meat without making it too "soupy". Add a package of Taco Seasoning (or half the package depending on how spicy you like it). Stir thoroughly. Serve in taco shells or burrito wraps with lettuce, chopped tomatoes, salsa, sour cream, shredded cheese, and any other favorites.

Mexican Cornbread: Spread the cooked Saucy Ground Beef in the bottom of a greased 9" baking pan. Mix one box of Jiffy cornbread mix according to package directions and pour over the top of the meat. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes or until cornbread is done.

Chili: Add to the cooked Saucy Ground Beef, one can (any size, depending on how many beans you like in chili) of kidney beans, drained, a large can (28 ozs.) of tomatoes, 1 teaspoon chili powder (adjust amount to suit your taste). Add tomato sauce, or bottled chili sauce, and water to reach desired consistency.