

Convenient Beef Products



Photo by Gabe Palacio/Image Direct

The beef industry has responded to consumer demand for convenient meal solutions by developing a variety of pre-cooked and pre-seasoned beef products. Your family can sit down to pot roast “like mom used to make” after only 10 minutes in the microwave, or a nutritious salad or pasta dish made with pre-cooked beef strips. Today's consumer can find more than 100 new beef products nationwide which will reduce time in the kitchen as well as provide a nutrient bundle of iron, zinc, protein and b-vitamins.

Advances in technology have allowed food manufacturers to develop a completely cooked product that can be re-heated in the microwave without having a “warmed over” flavor. These “heat and eat” beef products provide consumers with fresh tasting beef meals in a fraction of the time required for traditional preparation. There are a variety of products available including beef stew, pot roast, roast beef and even pre-cooked steaks with gourmet sauces. In addition to fully cooked entrees, there are also prepared ground beef crumbles, sirloin strips and shredded beef products. The crumbles can be used for making spaghetti sauce and tacos, or strips can be tossed with fresh veggies for an easy, healthful meal.

Pre-cooked and pre-seasoned beef products are available in the fresh meat case of most major grocery stores. Many of these products are widely distributed, and new ideas are being developed everyday, so check

out your grocer’s meat case often. These items are not shelf stable, they must remain refrigerated, and they have expiration dates. If you don’t think you’ll use a product before its expiration date, freeze it as soon as possible. As you would do with fresh beef, thaw pre-cooked products in the refrigerator or microwave oven and use them within two days of thawing.

Other new beef products include seasoned and/or marinated beef products that are ready to be cooked. Complement these entrees with salads and side dishes. They are suitable for dinner parties, holiday gatherings or a simple meal with family and friends.

Don’t forget to check out the frozen foods section at your local grocery store. Several companies have developed frozen meals with pasta, beef, vegetables and sauce. These quick-to-fix meals

are prepared in one pan and, when served with a fruit salad, meet *Food Guide Pyramid* recommendations for a balanced meal.

Beef is an important component of the *Food Guide Pyramid* because it provides significant amounts of several key nutrients. The new beef products contain these same essential nutrients, like zinc, iron, protein and many B-vitamins. Many of them are also low in fat, saturated fat and cholesterol, and can be designated lean according to USDA labeling guidelines. Most are moderate in sodium and fit easily into a heart healthy diet. However, the amount of sodium in these products varies, so if you are on a salt restricted diet, be sure to check the Nutrition Facts label.

Beef is a good source of essential nutrients:

- Zinc - improves health and supports the immune system, helps fight off colds and viruses, and aids memory and brain function
- Iron - helps support the immune system, carries oxygen to body tissues and enhances energy production
- Protein - essential to build and maintain strong muscles
- B-vitamins - vital to normal growth and development, help unleash the energy in the food we eat.¹

1. Mahan, Kathleen L., Escott-Stump, Sylvia. Krause’s Food Nutrition and Diet Therapy, 9th Edition. W.B. Saunders Company. Philadelphia: 1996.

Not all of these products have national distribution, but several manufacturers have developed similar products. Different grocery store chains carry different brands, so be sure to check all the retailers in your area.