

Meal Delivery Programs Help You Get Cooking and Eating

Easy and convenient, meal-in-a-box deliveries are soaring in popularity. EN reviews popular programs to help you find the best one for your needs.


Meal delivery programs are a new solution for time-starved individuals who want to eat healthier and cook more delicious meals at home. Although these programs vary slightly in pricing, customization, and dietary preferences, they provide all of the pre-portioned ingredients and recipes—often prepared by chefs and reviewed by dietitians—with step-by-step instructions and photographs in a recyclable and insulated box delivered straight to your front door.

Challenges for getting healthy meals on the table. Meal delivery programs remove some of the barriers to healthier eating, such as time, planning, and lack of culinary skills. Rebecca Lewis, MS, RD, registered dietitian nutritionist for the meal delivery program HelloFresh, recognizes many of these barriers. She says, “Many people feel overwhelmed by the idea of selecting and planning out recipes, writing up a grocery list, going to the store, purchasing everything, bringing it home, cleaning and prepping the ingredients, and then finally getting to actually cook it.”

Eating out vs. eating in. Such barriers explain why we’re eating out more often. According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, consumption of food prepared away from home has increased dramatically in the past 50 years. In 1970, roughly 25 percent of food purchases were spent on foods prepared away from home; by 2012, that number nearly doubled. Foods consumed away from home are less healthy, contributing

more calories, fat, and sodium; and less fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, according to a 2015 study published in *International Journal of Obesity* 2015. Conversely, cooking meals at home is associated with a healthier diet.

Saving time—and money. You may be deterred by the price tag of various programs, which range from \$45–60 per week for 3 meals for two people. Yet, meal delivery programs may actually help save money, since food waste is limited, by providing pre-portioned ingredients. And for individuals following special

diets, such as gluten-free or vegetarian, these programs save time, effort, and the guess-work involved in finding the right ingredients for a meal. Eco-conscious programs source from organic, sustainable ingredients, raising awareness of the importance of such issues. Each meal delivery program has its pluses and minuses, but they all provide a great option for busy people who want to find their way back to the kitchen to prepare delicious, healthy meals. 

—Barbara Ruhs, MS, RDN



Meal Delivery Program Review

EN reviewed several (but not all) popular meal delivery programs in this comparison.



MEAL DELIVERY PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	MEAL PLAN OPTIONS	FEATURES	PRICE
Blue Apron	Seasonal recipes developed by in-house culinary team and guest chefs using ingredients sourced from family-run businesses Available nationwide	Select from 2-person or family plans Provide dietary preferences for personalized menus	Ingredients sourced from small family farms and artisanal purveyors that use sustainable practices Market on website allows purchase of cooking tools and equipment Monthly wine program available	2-person plan: \$9.99 per person per meal, 3 meals per week (\$59.94/week) Family plan: \$8.74 per person (\$69.92/week for 2 meals; \$139.84/week for 4 meals)
Sun Basket	Fresh organic meals with hand-selected, seasonal, sustainable, responsibly-sourced ingredients from the Pacific Coast Available in CA, OR, WA, CO, UT, AZ, NV, ID	Choose from 3 recipes each week from the following options: • Chef's Basket • Gluten-Free • Paleo • Vegetarian	Organic, GMO-free, pesticide-free meals from sustainable sources Packaging is 100% recyclable with free return shipping In-house dietitian to review meals Nutrition Facts for recipes available for preview before delivery	\$11.49 per person per meal; includes 3 meals per week 2-person plan: \$68.94/week 4-person plan: \$137.88/week 6-person plan: \$206.82/week
HelloFresh	Recipes from a variety of cuisines, created by in-house chefs and reviewed by an in-house dietitian to ensure balanced nutrition Available nationwide	Classic (for Omnivores) allows for choice of 3 recipes from 5 options. Veggie Box for Herbivores (vegetarian) features pre-selected recipes	Allergen information available Mainstream recipes that have broad appeal.	Options for 2 or 4 persons; includes 3 meals per week Classic: \$10.75 per meal Veggie: \$9.08 per meal
Plated	Chef-designed, easy recipes Available in domestic U.S.; excludes some cities in Texas	Vegetarian (dairy-free, vegan), meat and seafood recipes offered each week; curated based on your taste profile	Highly customizable Option to add dessert to meals for \$4	\$12 per portion 2 recipes (4 total portions): \$48 per week (+\$6 shipping) 3 recipes (6 total portions): \$72 per week (free shipping) 4 recipes (8 total portions): \$96 per week (free shipping)
Marley Spoon	Chef designed recipes with an international flavor and quality ingredients Available in NY, NJ, CT, PA, RI, MA, DE, MD, WV, D.C.	Meal choices are pre-selected based on taste preferences Vegetarian, fish and meat options	Organic options are sourced whenever possible	\$8.90 per portion 2-person for 3 meals per week: \$61.50 May customize for 2–8 people with 1–3 meals per week



Meal delivery programs offer easy and delicious meal solutions, such as this recipe from Plated.