

# The Pros and Cons of Meal Kit Services

Meal kit services have been around for several years, but they have soared in popularity since the pandemic began. Ads for meal prep services are everywhere, on your social media feeds, on the television, and in magazines. The companies' names are fun and catchy such as Blue Apron, Hello Fresh, and Home Chef. The sign-up processes for each of the companies are quite straightforward too, letting you note your delivery and meal preferences. Once a week, you can have a box chockfull of delicious ingredients delivered to your door.

No one can argue that meal services aren't convenient, but are these services right for you? Pricing for meal kits usually comes at a premium and, except for meal services like Freshly, you still must cook the meal.

Before you sign up for meal services, here's what you need to know.

## Why Meal Kit Boxes Make Sense

### Prep Work Is Done

The number one selling point of these kits is that all the prep work is done when it arrives at your door. The ingredients are diced, sliced, cleaned, easily identifiable, and ready to cook immediately. Making dinner takes less time and there's less clean-up.

### Meal Planning Is Easier

Do you struggle with deciding what's for dinner? Walk into any grocery store and you'll be overwhelmed with choices. With weekly meal kits, you have fewer choices. The limited selection might seem like a con, but for many, it's one of the deciding factors to invest in the service.

### Food Waste Is Reduced

How many times have you spent money on food that goes to waste? Most people overestimate how much food they need to make meals. Or the food goes bad because you don't feel like cooking and spend more money ordering delivery. Less food waste is better for your budget and for the environment. It also keeps your refrigerator clean and organized.

### Healthier Choices

A lot of households struggle with planning nutritional meals. They purchase boxed meals that have additives and preservatives that are high in sodium, sugar, and fat. Meal kits like Hello Fresh are nutritionally balanced and the variety of meals let you try an assortment of grains and

vegetables and expand your palette. Who knew eating healthier could be as easy as opening a cardboard box?

### Specialized Meals

People have unique dietary needs. A benefit of meal services is that they often offer special diet options. For example, Purple Carrot's meal delivery service has numerous options for vegetarians and vegans, while Green Chef is a great choice for people on gluten-free diets.

### The Drawbacks of Using a Meal Prep Service

#### Pricing Is Higher Than You Think

Meal kit services devote a lot of money to their marketing and branding. They're good at convincing people that their meals are affordable, but they're not always telling the whole story. If you ate out every night, the meal delivery company is comparable price-wise. It's not comparable to buying the same ingredients in the kit from the grocery store and making it yourself. Also, the prices advertised are generally for two people. Larger families will pay more for their kits.

Keep in mind that most meal services only cover one meal a day. This means you're still grocery shopping and preparing food for other meals and buying snacks. For some families, meal kits can double the grocery bill. Also, most meal services offer trial pricing that isn't reflective of what you'll actually pay when you sign up for the service.

#### Food Items Are Perishable

To get the most for your money, you need to stay on schedule with your meals. Most meal services include fresh ingredients that will go bad if not used within so many days. If you want to try a meal service program, but you don't want to eat on a schedule, consider a service like Daily Harvest that offers frozen meals, smoothies, and overnight oat bowls.

#### You Have to Monitor Your Membership

Meal services don't require their members to sign a contract or commit to a certain number of meals. That's a plus, but using these services requires constant monitoring. If you're going out of town for a week or two, you need to remember to pause the delivery. Forget to do this and you'll have a leaky cardboard box waiting for you at your door.

#### Excess Packaging

Meal kits include a lot of packaging. Inside each box you'll find the following:

- Ingredients packed separately

- Insulation/padding to protect the food
- Ice packs, dry ice, or other cooling sources to keep all ingredients fresh while in transit

The good news is that most of the packaging is recyclable, but you're still responsible for managing a lot of materials. Whether this is good or bad is up to individual preferences. Some people have no problem with extra packaging, while others might not.

### Try Several Meal Kit Services

If you're interested in a meal prep service, don't try one and call it a day. There are too many players on the field. Instead, consider all of your options. Most meal services offer trials that let you try the service at a reduced rate. Try each service for a week or two to find out what works best for you and your family.

At only \$5 a serving, EveryPlate is a budget-friendly option, but it doesn't offer a lot of options. Have picky eaters at home? Home Chef has as many as 38 meal kit options, which is significantly more than any other service. When choosing a service, find out how often the menu is changed. Are recipes that are always offered?

All meal kit services have their pros and cons. Nothing is perfect for everyone. Every household needs to decide for themselves what makes sense for their budget and food preferences. One thing is for sure though. Meal services aren't going away any time soon. The convenience and variety they offer have been embraced by households everywhere. No more do you have to scramble to put together a meal. With meal services, you always know what's for dinner.