



Finding the Right MEAL PREPARATION SERVICE

by Lisa Allman

Finding the right meal service can be challenging. One family caregiver shared, “My mom is no longer cooking for herself, and her health is suffering as a result. Something’s got to change, but I’m not sure which option would work best for her.”

Meal delivery services are convenient and affordable, but can’t be customized and sometimes aren’t very healthy. Meal kit companies offer variety, but require online ordering, and you have to do the cooking and cleanup. Having a homecare aide prepare freshly made meals also offers companionship, but they’re typically not trained cooks and their services are expensive.

Personal chef services provide high-quality, fully customized meals and companionship, but they can be more expensive. The same caregiver said, “What would be nice is unbiased information about food options for seniors.”

Meal Delivery

- Tend to be more affordable, charging \$8 to \$14 per meal plus shipping, which is approximately \$20 per order.
- Order meals online for a cooler full of frozen meals to be delivered in three to seven days. Meals can be heated at your convenience.

- Meals are prepared in a factory setting, so exact calorie counts and other nutrient breakdowns are available, which is helpful for dietary concerns.
- Meals are prepared in a central location then shipped, so you can order from anywhere in the United States.
- Many seniors have dietary concerns and food preferences, but companies cannot accommodate because meals are mass produced.
- Most deliver a cooler of mass-produced IQF (individual quick

freezing) frozen meals, which aren’t as fresh and tasty as other options.

- Meals might not be eaten—instead, simply being stacked in the freezer.
- Excess waste because of disposable containers.

Meal Kit Companies

- Blue Apron, Hello Fresh, and similar companies offer online ordering. Meal kits are mailed with recipes and cooking instructions packaged in materials that keep food a certain temperature.
- Many have a wide meal selection, including vegetarian and gluten-free options.
- While many have a large entrée selection, they’re unable to customize for dietary restrictions and food preferences.
- Requires online ordering, leaving some seniors at a disadvantage if they don’t have a computer or internet services.
- Meal kits provide ingredients for meal preparation. You cook and clean up.

Homecare Aide Prepared Meals

- Meals are prepared in client’s home, which offers a great opportunity for companionship.
- Aides typically don’t prepare make-ahead meals for the week, instead preparing one meal at a time and plating it for client.
- The highest cost option. The average hourly rate is \$25, so two meals per day with a one-hour prep time per meal is \$350 per week plus groceries.
- May not have much cooking experience, which can affect quality and be limited for special diets.
- Typically not ServSafe certified, so not trained in proper food preparation and storage procedures, which could lead to food safety issues.

Personal Chef

- Many have professional cooking experience and culinary degrees, so meal quality is typically far better.
- Customizes meals to meet dietary concerns and food preferences, and can work with your dietitian and doctor to ensure you’re eating in accordance with recommendations.

- Meals are prepared in your home, providing companionship as well as a fun experience.
- Most are ServSafe certified, so they’re knowledgeable about proper food handling and storage procedures, helping to avoid the potential for foodborne illness.
- After food preparation, will clean the kitchen.
- Most are affordable, but more expensive than meal delivery services, although there are exceptions.
- The personal chef industry is relatively new, so not available everywhere. Most located in and around major metropolitan areas.

Finding the right meal service is an important part of aging well at home. When considering options, reach out to a variety of companies to discuss specific needs. Be sure to consider customization and companionship when weighing costs as they add great value to meal service.

Lisa Allman is co-founder of Chefs For Seniors, which charges \$125 plus groceries (\$40 to \$80) for approximately 12 meal servings. Cost is often less than the cost of a takeout meal or meal delivery. Flexible plans allow client to use the service as often and long as they choose.

Photographs provided by Chefs For Seniors.



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