



## Dinner On Your Doorstep

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With the holidays, and all the tempting sweets and treats that come along with it, behind us, now is the perfect time to kick start the New Year with a *clean* slate. No matter what your goals or resolutions are this year, eating more fresh, whole foods is an excellent place to start. And that means cooking more at home....I know, I know, who has time for that?! But don't panic just yet!

Sure, it can be tough giving up some of those packaged, processed favorites and go-to take out meals, but cooking doesn't have to be a burden. Plus, there are plenty of time-saving tricks to assist you including the booming, multi-billion dollar meal delivery kit industry.

### Meal Delivery Services

The meal delivery service concept started about 10 years ago in Stockholm, Sweden by a mother of three who noticed that families wanted to eat at home but struggled to manage the logistics of meal planning, purchasing and cooking. The startup business was hugely successful and took on like wildfire, spreading to hundreds of different companies worldwide.

So what exactly is a home meal delivery service? Well, it's a company that ships ingredients and recipes to your house and you prepare and cook the meal. There are other companies that ship prepared meals and all you have to do is simply heat them up, but that's not what we're discussing today.

### Which Meal Delivery Service is Right for You?

While there are tons of companies, both locally and nationally, that offer meal delivery services, our team purchased and reviewed 5 of the better known national companies. Below is a summary of our experiences and discoveries.

\*Our reviews are unbiased and we did not receive any compensation from the companies.

#### [Blue Apron](#)

Blue Apron, a New York based startup has grown to a \$2 billion business in less than 3 years and is one of the most well-known companies in the industry.

Services and Options:

- Offers both a 2 person and a family plan that includes 2 to 4 meals per week.
- Each meal ranges in price from \$8.74 to \$9.99 per serving.
- Gives you the ability to customize dietary preferences such as vegetarian eating.
- Provides a free app to manage weekly deliveries and meal choices as well as discover seasonal recipes and cooking tips.

Verdict:

- + Easy ordering, beautiful website.
- + Packaging very similar to other leading companies with as much reusable, recyclable materials as possible but still a bit of waste.
- + Portions were good but most meals intended for 2 people had some leftovers.
- + Food quality was fantastic and recipe cards were easy to follow.
- Nutrition information is not provided, only a calorie estimate (which often was on the high side at 650-750 calories per serving).

### Hello Fresh

Another leading company in the industry, Hello Fresh has expanded across the globe since its launch in 2011 and offers more than 4 million meals each month.

Services and Options:

- Offers both a 2 person and a family plan that includes 3 to 5 meals per week.
- Each meal ranges in price from \$8.75 to \$11.50 per serving (shipping is free).
- There are several subscription options including a Classic Box (“from traditional favorites to new cuisines”), a Veggie Box (vegetarian meals) and a Family Box (“delicious twists on classic dishes with child friendly recipes”).
- Provides a free app to manage weekly deliveries, discover and save new recipes and cooking tips, and sync nutritional information of prepared meals with the iPhone Health App.

Verdict:

- + Ordering is simple and straightforward with good communication.
- + Packaging was all recyclable or reusable with very little plastic.
- + Portions were generous and there were leftovers.
- + Quality was excellent and recipe cards were easy to understand and follow- “restaurant quality.”
- The outside of the box was wet and ice packs were melted (ordered during the warmer months).

### Plated

Services and Options:

- Offers a plan for 2 people (no family box) that includes 2-7 meals per week.
- Each meal is \$12.00 per serving.
- There are 7 regular meals, 2 Chef’s table meals (for an additional price) and 2 desserts to choose from each week.
- There is no real customization beforehand but each recipe is clearly labeled for any dietary preferences (made without gluten, vegetarian, quick prep, etc) and you can see the recipes before choosing them.
- Provides a free app to manage weekly deliveries, see upcoming menus and discover new recipes.

Verdict:

- + Website is easy to follow and you can easily skip weeks and view delivery schedule.
- + Great communication.
- + Portions were big.
- + Recipe cards are easy to follow and had calorie counts.
- Must go online for full nutrition facts.
- No family plan available.
- Quality was varied (this box was ordered in the warmer months and the chicken for one meal had to be tossed because it was not cold upon delivery; the company credited the full meal though).

### Green Chef

Services and Options:

- Offers both a 2 person and a family plan (up to 6 people) that includes 3 meals per week.
- Each meal ranges in price from \$10.49 to \$14.99 per serving.
- Uses organic, sustainably sourced ingredients with no artificial ingredients.
- Gives you the ability to customize dietary preferences (omnivore, Paleo, etc) and see every ingredient and nutrition information before choosing a meal.

Verdict:

- + Ordering was very easy and you can easily skip weeks.
- + Portions are generous with LOTS of vegetables if you choose the Paleo option in particular.
- + Quality was great, all organic and beautiful.
- + Recipe cards are easy to follow and had calorie counts.
- Must go online for full nutrition facts.
- There aren't a ton of options and you can't pick and choose- you just get what's on your plan.

### Home Chef

Services and Options:

- Offers both a 2 person and a family plan (up to 8 servings) that includes 2-8 meals per week.
- Each meal is \$9.95 per serving (with the exception of the "special occasion" meals that cost more).
- Have 13 dishes to choose from each week plus add-ons like fruit baskets, smoothies and breakfast items.
- Gives you the ability to customize dietary preferences (low carb, vegetarian, gluten-free, etc).

Verdict:

- + Recipes were easy to follow and nutrition information was provided on the card.

- Ordering was frustrating at times.
- Choices were disappointing.
- Choices are limited for dietary restrictions (there might only be 1 gluten-free meal that week, for example).
- Packaging wasn't great. The box insulation is starch based, like rice packing so it disintegrates when they get wet.
- Portions and quality were okay, not great.
- One meal had NO vegetables (but all meals are different).

### **Meal Delivery Service: Yay or Nay?**

Like with anything, there are pros and cons to meal delivery services. Each company is different and while it's fun in the beginning, you may find in the long run they don't actually save you much time since many of the recipes may be more involved than the ones you'd normally prepare. However, it is a fantastic way to get out of a recipe rut and get new culinary ideas.

#### **Overall PROS:**

- + Convenient (less grocery shopping, minimal meal planning)
- + Learn new cooking techniques
- + Allows you to try new foods and spice/ flavor combinations
- + Variety (can help get you out of a recipe rut and build your recipe repertoire)
- + Leftovers!! (depending on the meal and the company, but you often get more portions than expected)

#### **Overall CONS:**

- Packaging is not very environmentally-friendly (companies are working on this, but there is currently still a lot of waste)
- High price tag (likely cheaper than eating out but more expensive than doing it yourself- plus you still have to cook and clean!)
- Not for people with food allergies due to cross contamination
- Time consuming (still takes as long, or longer, to prepare meals due to chopping, dicing, etc involved all while having to learn new recipes)
- Planning is still required to figure out what else you may need for that meal and to make sure food is cooked and consumed before it goes bad- often very perishable
- All meals are NOT usually nutritionally balanced and calorie counts are likely not accurate
- Risk of food poisoning the warmer months of the year (when in doubt, throw it out!)

**FINAL VERDICT:** Pay close attention to the details before you sign-up for anything. Each company is different and tailors to a slightly different audience. Understand that you aren't guaranteed a healthy meal that is appropriate for your calorie, protein and carbohydrate needs- portions may be too big, there may or may not be enough protein or vegetables, there may be too many carbs, etc. These services are very convenient and can provide some fantastic new recipe ideas though, so hopefully this information will help you decide which meal delivery company (if any) is right for you!