

Can You Save Money By Eating Out?



It seems logical to think that stopping somewhere on the way home and buying a pre-prepared dinner would be more expensive than making it at home. But by how much? And does it save you time?

I got a bug in my ear on this subject and decided to do a little research.

I went to the Boston Market website to make my comparison. Now, I'm not picking on Boston Market. They seem to have decent food offerings. They also have over 500 locations and over 14,000 employees, so they have to be doing some things right. I am using them for my comparison thinking many of you are familiar with the company.

I wanted to compare chicken dinner offerings. On the front page of their menu they feature a chicken dinner that includes a large piece of chicken including dark and white meat, some red skinned potatoes, a serving of green beans and a piece of cornbread. A pretty normal dinner.

So what does it cost for a family of four to buy this dinner at

Boston Market? If you buy the “package deal” you get it for \$37.37. If you were to buy it individually (so maybe not everyone would eat the same thing) it comes in at \$10.92 per person or \$43.68 for dinner for four.

My next stop was my grocery store. I live in Chicago, so it stands to reason that maybe the food here is a bit more expensive than where you live. So let’s factor that into the equation. I priced out four options for my chicken. In the deli they have the pre-prepared rotisserie chickens. They are \$6.98 each. They are sort of small, so to feed four I’d probably buy two. If you go to the fresh chicken section, a 6 lb chicken will run you \$14.00. That will definitely feed four. And if you buy your chicken cut up, enough to feed four will run you \$11.

Let’s go to produce. 1 lb of green beans will run \$1.75. That’s plenty. If you choose frozen beans they will run you \$2.

The red potatoes are 75 cents a pound. If you buy 3 pounds you’ll feed 4 hungry people and might even have some left over.

With the cornbread I got lazy, so I found one in the bakery that was \$4.50. You’ll get six sizable pieces from that choice, so a couple of pieces will be left over.

The most expensive options here add up to \$22.50. So buying it and taking it home is about 60% more expensive. That’s a lot. But you might be saying... but I’ll save time!

Let’s look at that a bit more. Let’s guess on some of the time elements involved.

Unless you drive by Boston Market on your way home, you’ll likely have to detour to get there. So let’s put in 10 minutes for that.

You’ll likely have to wait in line if you’re buying it on the

way home after work. I have driven by Boston Market on more than one occasion and looked into see maybe 10 people waiting to get food. Let's give it the benefit of the doubt and add 15 more minutes to get your food; with the consideration that you knew exactly what you wanted when you got there and didn't have to ponder the ribs, the turkey, and all the other options they offer.

You've got your food and now have to drive home. Maybe your commute is 20 minutes so you might decide you need to reheat the food upon your arrival. So let's put in 15 minutes for reheating. Now you are ready to serve.

This all conveniently adds up to 60 minutes. You got dinner and got it on the table in an hour.

What time would it take to make the dinner at home?

Well, you still have to drive home and you might even need to stop at the store to pick up the food. So let's leave in 20 minutes for commute and 15 minutes in the grocery store to pick up the items needed.

Now, you're home. You turn on the oven to preheat it. Open your chicken and put it in the pan. Good news is you can flavor it any way you want. You could sprinkle on your favorite meat rub, or dust a bit of Italian seasoning over the top or just salt and pepper. Spray olive oil spray on top and that's ready to hit the oven. If I am in a hurry, I'd choose the cut up chicken because that will cut cooking time by a lot. If you chose all chicken breast pieces off the bone, they only need about 20 minutes to cook at 400 degrees.

The potatoes need to be rinsed off, cut up and put in a pan of boiling water. Once the water is boiling they don't take long to cook. Maybe 12-14 minutes. You could also roast them but that would take about 30 minutes. I chose boil only because that's

how they were cooked in the Boston Market menu picture.

And the beans. You can boil those too or put them in the oven with the chicken and roast them for 15 minutes and they will be done.

I realize I'm a seasoned cook and I might work a little faster than some, but in my mind, this whole dinner takes me about 15 minutes to prep and about 30 minutes max to cook it. I'm topping out at 45 minutes and I can customize the meal more than eating something that was cooked hours ago and just reheated.

I could season the chicken as I pointed out earlier. I can roast my potatoes or put seasoning and butter on my potatoes. I could doctor up the green beans. Maybe sprinkle some soy sauce on them or toss in some pine nuts and a dusting of parmesan at the end. Yes, those are things I'd have to have on hand or buy them, but in my book it's always going to taste better if you made it fresh. On top of that, you'd have time to heat and add a pat of butter to your piece of cornbread. Yum.

So, I have saved a little bit of time and a whole lot of money. Done deal for me. How about you?

Cheers,