The public has long been curious about the food that astronauts bring into space. The first American astronauts dined on freeze-dried foods and semi-liquids squeezed from tubes, but “cosmic cuisine” has improved tremendously since then. Today, astronauts rely on four types of space food: rehydratable, thermostabilzed, irradiated, and natural-form items. Beverages come as powders that are combined with water.

The meals eaten onboard the Space Shuttle and International Space Station are prepared on Earth; many of them are commercially available in grocery stores. Food items have to be carefully packaged to prevent their floating in the microgravity of space; special straws facilitate drinking, and cutlery is magnetic.

For future missions lasting several years to Mars and beyond, nutritional needs become even more important. To ensure a balanced diet, astronauts will have to grow fruits, vegetables, and grains, and be their own cooks.