

Title:

Convenience Food Tips

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Summary:

While it would be ideal to make all of our own snacks and meals from scratch everyday, the plain and simple truth is that most of us simply don't have that kind of time. This is where we turn to convenience foods to meet our dietary and weight loss needs. However, the right convenience foods in the right amounts can easily be integrated into almost any diet.

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Keywords:

Article Body:

While it would be ideal to make all of our own snacks and meals from scratch everyday, the plain and simple truth is that most of us simply don't have that kind of time. This is where we turn to convenience foods to meet our dietary and weight loss needs. However, the right convenience foods in the right amounts can easily be integrated into almost any diet.

Shop Smart - Never shop on an empty stomach. This will only make it harder for you to make choices that are in your best interests. Always be prepared with a thorough shopping list and do not divert from it. If an aisle is full of tempting goodies but has nothing on your list, simply walk right by it, instead of down it. If you see something healthy that you would like, but it's not on your list, jot it down and add it to the list next time. This will provide you with something to look forward to.

Reach for the smaller bags and boxes of what you need when possible. The less food you have leftover in your kitchen translates into less temptation.

Read Labels - All convenience foods are not the same. Depending on your chosen diet, some will fit much better into your routine than others. This is why it's important to become an informed consumer and never place anything in your grocery basket unless you've read the label and determined it's in your best

interests to buy it.

Many snack foods come in different versions—low fat, reduced fat, low calorie, low carbohydrate, low salt, etc. Choose the variety that best fits your dieting needs.

Remember that different labels can mean entirely different things. The following list may help you discern between them:

No calorie: Less than 5 calories per serving

Low calorie: Less than 40 calories per serving (or less than 120 calories per meal)

Reduced calorie: 25% less calories than the same amount of a similar food

No fat: Less than 0.5g fat per serving

Low fat: Less than 3g fat per serving (less than 30% of calories from fat per meal)

Low saturated fat: Less than 1g fat per serving

Reduced fat: 25% less fat than the same amount of a similar food

No cholesterol: Less than 2mg cholesterol per serving

Low cholesterol: Less than 20mg cholesterol per serving

Reduced cholesterol: 25% less cholesterol than the same amount of a similar food

No salt: Less than 5mg sodium per serving

Low salt: Less than 140mg sodium per serving

Reduced salt: 25% less sodium than the same amount of a similar food

No sugar: Less than 0.5g sugar per serving

Low sugar: No requirements—make sure to read the label

Reduced sugar: 25% less sugar than the same amount of a similar food

As you can see, eating six servings of a no-fat food can actually total as much as 3g of fat. For someone who is severely restricting their fat intake, this can greatly hinder their progress. It's best to be informed and make wise shopping decisions. Take charge and be responsible.

Trim the Fat - Just because a macaroni and cheese frozen dinner is oozing extra cheese doesn't mean you have to eat it. A common sense approach to preparing and consuming convenience foods can go a long way to making them healthier.

When you take a frozen meal out halfway to stir it, remove or blot away any excess oils and fats. Transfer to a real plate when finished, so you can discard

the excess sauces.

If rice or pasta calls for a heaping tablespoon of butter, opt instead for a conservative teaspoon of soy margarine or olive oil. Ultimately your rice will taste the same and you won't have all those extra calories to contend with.

Milk and cookies is a long-time favorite, but try for milk and crackers next time. Experiment with jellies and spreads instead of the usual mayonnaise and butter for toppings.

Portion Control - It's easy to lose track of how much you've eaten when you drink or eat straight from the container. Stay on track by carefully measuring out serving sizes before you begin eating.

When you do buy items like chips or pretzels, locate the appropriate serving size on the nutrition label. As soon as you arrive home, divide the larger bag into individual servings in small plastic baggies.

In this same spirit, when snacking on any food, separate a single serving's worth and put it aside in a plate or bowl. Then immediately put the food away, before you begin eating, to avoid temptation.

Try not to make the original packages easily accessible. Purchasing a bag re-sealer is more effective than using chip clips, because you are less likely to cut open a bag than to simply unclip it. Heavy-duty tape and hard-to-open containers can also do the trick.

Fast Food - Ideally, fast food should be avoided. However, the ever-expanding menus at many of the top fast-food chains are now offering many options that can fit into a variety of diet plans.

Look for grilled meals instead of fried. Opt for alternate sides instead of French fries if possible. Many chains offer salad and yogurt options as well.

Ask for substitutions if a menu item is not quite ideal. For example, you can request a hamburger without a bun, or you can request a bun without a hamburger. If you cannot get the substitution, make modifications yourself before eating, i.e. throw the hamburger bun in a nearby garbage bin or discard half your French fries.

Make Your Own - There's no rule that says only store-bought, pre-packaged foods are convenient. Take time on the weekend or on days off to do some conscientious grocery shopping and cook one or two large meals of something healthy that you

enjoy. Separate into serving sizes and refrigerate (or freeze) as necessary.

Buy fruits, vegetables, deli meats, and cheeses to snack on, and prepare them ahead of time by slicing into bite-sized pieces. Separate into serving sizes and store to use as snacks during the week; since they now require no preparation, you'll be more likely to reach for the carrot sticks and less likely to reach for more processed convenience foods. Your own frozen vegetables make a delicious side dish in a snap.

Voila! Now you have your own frozen dinners (or lunches, or snacks) with much healthier contents.