

Making Convenience Meals Better for You

Do you often find yourself turning to pre-packaged meals when you're hungry? Whether it's canned, frozen, or made by a grocery store, convenience meals can be a lifesaver. They're convenient and taste good, but they can also be loaded with calories, fat, and sodium. Here are some ways to try and make these meals a little more nutritious.

Sodium: Many convenience foods have high salt content in them. Salt is often used as a preservative to keep foods from spoiling, which is why these foods often have a long shelf life. There are also a lot of brands of canned goods that offer low sodium or no salt added options, and those are the best place to start. If you buy canned vegetables or beans with salt in them, you can drain and rinse them to reduce the amount.

Serving sizes: Did you know that a package of food is not always equal to one serving? It's true! There are a lot of canned, frozen, and other pre-packaged items that may be two or even three servings. It helps to read the nutrition label to see how many servings are in a container and if the nutrition lines up with your eating habits. Look at the below labels for examples.

Nutrition Facts & Ingredients				
About 2 Servings Per Container				
Serving size	1 Cup (240mL)			
		PER SERVING		PER CONTAINER
Calories		120		260
		% DV*		% DV*
Total Fat	3g	4%	7g	9%
Saturated Fat	1g	5%	1.5g	8%
Trans Fat	0g		0g	
Cholesterol	30mg	10%	65mg	22%
Sodium	790mg	34%	1690mg	73%
Total Carbohydrate	14g	5%	30g	11%
Dietary Fiber	1g	4%	2g	7%
Total Sugars	2g		3g	
Incl. Added Sugars	0g	0%	1g	2%
Protein	8g	14%	18g	31%
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%	0mcg	0%
Calcium	20mg	0%	50mg	4%
Iron	0.8mg	4%	1.6mg	8%
Potassium	510mg	10%	1090mg	25%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

A can of Campbell's Chunky Chicken Noodle Soup is just over 2 servings per can.

Nutrition Facts	
3 servings per container	
Serving size	1/3 Pizza (149 g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	350
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 16g	21%
Saturated Fat 7g	35%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 640mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 35g	13%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 3g	
Incl. <1g Added Sugars	2%
Protein 16g	22%
Vitamin D 7mcg	35%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 2.9mg	15%
Potassium 220mg	4%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

A Jack's Sausage Pizza comes in at 3 servings per pizza.

Add your own healthy touches: Get creative with ways to make these foods healthier. Love frozen pizza? Add some peppers, onions, or mushrooms before you bake it for some extra flavor and nutrients. Is canned beef stew more your style? Have a slice of whole grain toast or a prepackaged salad on the side! If you have more ideas, let the SAPAS office know and it may be included in a future article.

It's easy to get lost in the fact that convenience foods might not be as healthy as other foods. Remember, if you're struggling to eat, it's always better to eat something than nothing at all. If you're on a sodium-restricted or other nutrient-restricted diet, it's best to talk with your doctor or a dietitian before making any changes.

Nutrient label sources: <https://www.goodnes.com/jacks/products/original-thin-sausage-pizza/> and <https://www.campbells.com/products/chunky/classic-chicken-noodle-soup-2/>.