



Healthy Convenience Foods



Life is busy and when it comes to taking care of children, you need something that is fast and easy to satisfy hunger. Often we reach for convenient, processed foods that may not have much nutritional value. Use this guide to find the right balance between convenience and nutrition.

Choose Healthy Convenience Foods

Convenience foods are foods that require little preparation. Processed means that a food has been altered from its original state. You can find healthy convenience and processed foods by choosing foods with:

- Whole grain
- Low sugar
- Low sodium
- Low fat and saturated fat
- No trans fat
- Fortified with vitamins and minerals
- Fiber



Make your Own Convenience Foods

- Precut produce—precut vegetables on a day you have more time so you can just toss them in a quick stir-fry, soup, or casserole
- Make more—prepare enough for leftovers the next day
- Freezer meals—make double and freeze for a busy day
- Snack bags—place cut up fruits or vegetables in the refrigerator in bags for a convenient snack instead of cookies and crackers

Defining “Processed”

Minimally Processed - These foods could be made at home. They might be chopped, cooked, frozen, or canned and often have few ingredients. Healthy convenience foods are usually minimally processed.

Highly Processed - These foods would be nearly impossible to make without special equipment. They include ingredients that could only be created in a laboratory like partially hydrogenated oils or high fructose corn syrup. They often are high in salt and sugar.

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Healthy and Convenient Foods

Vegetables/Fruits	Uses
Pasta sauce (low sodium)	Use in spaghetti, lasagna, pizza, or as dipping sauce
Bagged greens (e.g. spinach, mixed greens, lettuce)	Add to salads, sandwiches, soups
Pre-cut vegetables	Add to salads, sandwiches, soups
Pre-cut fruits	Add to cereals, pancakes, yogurt, smoothies, oatmeal, muffins
Frozen vegetables (no salt added)	Mix in casseroles, soups, stir-fry; heat up for a side dish
Frozen fruits (no sugar added)	Add to cereals, pancakes, yogurt, smoothies, oatmeal, muffins
Canned vegetables (no salt added)	Use in soups, casseroles, entrees, pasta sauces
Canned fruits (in 100% juice)	Add to cereals, yogurt, smoothies, oatmeal
Canned tomatoes (no salt added)	Use in soups, casseroles, entrees, pasta sauces
Meat/Meat Alternates	Uses
Canned beans (low sodium)	Add to salads, soups, tacos wraps, pasta, casseroles
Canned tuna or salmon (in water)	Put in sandwiches, salads, pasta, pitas, whole grain crackers
Rotisserie chicken (skin removed)	Add to salads, soups, sandwiches, wraps, casseroles, pasta
Yogurt (low fat, low sugar)	Use as a snack or in parfaits, fruit salad, dips
Grains/Breads	Uses
Pre-made pizza dough (whole wheat)	Make homemade pizza or calzones
5-minute brown rice	Perfect as a side dish or in a casserole
Breakfast cereal (whole grain, low sugar, high fiber)	Eat for breakfast or a snack; mix with yogurt
Oatmeal	Eat for breakfast, add to pancakes, smoothies, muffins, breads