



## Choosing Healthier Frozen Meals

Frozen meals are convenient and can be a great way for people who have minimal cooking skills to eat well. Preparing meals from scratch may be difficult for people who do not have enough cooking space, kitchen equipment, or utensils. Such meals can provide something delicious to eat with a minimal amount of work and time.

Today's methods of preparing, freezing and packaging meals helps retain much of the food's vitamin and mineral content and maintain its original texture and good taste, so eating frozen meals on a regular basis can be healthy as long as the choices you make are good ones.



### Selecting the Frozen Meal for You

- When selecting a frozen meal, read the "nutrition facts" panel on the package to make sure your choice is a healthy one.
- Some Weight Loss Clinic eating plans prescribe two levels of frozen meals: a light frozen dinner, with less than 300 calories and no more than 8 grams of fat; and a regular frozen dinner, with 360-400 calories and a maximum of 25 grams of fat.
- Check the portion size listed on the very top of the nutrition label. Some products have portions that are less than the entire contents of the box. This include pot pies and family packs.
- In general, look for entrees that include vegetables. These tend to be lower in calories and higher in vitamins and minerals as well as fiber. Choose those with brown rice or whole grains whenever possible, and choose lean meat, fish, chicken, or vegetarian type bean and tofu varieties.
- If one needs to eat a higher calorie level for weight maintenance or gain – two meals might be used – but then the sodium content also doubles. Then again, some meals provide more food components than others so one might need to add additional foods to round out your meal, ie, veggies or more veggies, dairy, and fruit.
- Frozen meals vary health and nutrition-wise. Some brands claim to be healthy because of their low calorie counts, but are low in protein or high in sodium. Other brands might have meals that taste great but contain high amounts of saturated fats, sodium and calories. Within a brand, there are different meal varieties and the nutrition content is different, better or worse from one to the other.

### *Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities*

Here are guidelines for choosing a healthy frozen meal checking the Nutrition Facts Label. Note that the Daily Value (DV) tells you how much of a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

- Check the servings per package and serving size per package.
- 250-500 **Calories** per serving
- Less than 18 g (grams) **Total Fat**
- Less than 7 g **Saturated Fat**, ideally a DV under 20%.
- **Zero Trans Fat**
- Less than 600 mg **Sodium** which is still high at 25% DV
- At least 3 g **Dietary Fiber**
- At least 7 g **Protein**, which is only equivalent to the protein in one egg or one ounce of meat.
- Be aware that this may be just one of your meals for the day so if it is higher in calories, total fat, and/or sodium than desired you should balance your other meals with lower amounts.
- Some people are looking to lose or maintain their weight, others to gain weight. Some of these meals are smaller portions and lower in calories that may leave you hungry. Many entrees don't provide the one to three servings of vegetables recommended.
- Add a salad. Include beans or nuts in the salad to boost protein and fiber. Add fruit to the salad or have on the side or as a snack. Include a low fat dairy product such as a glass of low fat milk or low fat and low sugar yogurt.

| <b>Nutrition Facts</b>               |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 4 servings per container             |                |
| <b>Serving size 1 1/2 cup (208g)</b> |                |
| Amount per serving                   |                |
| <b>Calories</b>                      | <b>240</b>     |
|                                      | % Daily Value* |
| <b>Total Fat</b> 4g                  | <b>5%</b>      |
| Saturated Fat 1.5g                   | <b>8%</b>      |
| Trans Fat 0g                         |                |
| <b>Cholesterol</b> 5mg               | <b>2%</b>      |
| <b>Sodium</b> 430mg                  | <b>19%</b>     |
| <b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 46g        | <b>17%</b>     |
| Dietary Fiber 7g                     | <b>25%</b>     |
| Total Sugars 4g                      |                |
| Includes 2g Added Sugars             | <b>4%</b>      |
| <b>Protein</b> 11g                   |                |
| Vitamin D 2mcg                       | <b>10%</b>     |
| Calcium 260mg                        | <b>20%</b>     |
| Iron 6mg                             | <b>35%</b>     |
| Potassium 240mg                      | <b>6%</b>      |

\* 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.

The brands and meals shown here are a representation of what is available and there are many others. They are geared to different tastes and lifestyles. Within a brand some choices will be healthier than others in terms of the nutrients they provide, additives and preservatives, etc.



**Amy's®:** Offers vegetarian meals made with organic ingredients. The meals are labeled with symbols making it easy for consumers to spot choices that are vegan, low-fat, certified Kosher, dairy-free, soy-free, tree-nut free, or cholesterol-free.



**Banquet:** Offers “Classic dinners”, “Mega Sandwiches”, pot pies, “Home-style Meals”, and other products. Meals vary in calories, fat and sodium so it depends on the product and serving size. Meat Lover’s Deep Dish meal (1 cup) has 580 calories, 14 g protein, 30 g of fat, 13 g of saturated fat (65% DV), and 890 mg of sodium (61% DV). This product is high in total fat, saturated fat, and sodium.



**Boston Market:** Offers a line of frozen entrees and pot pies similar to the style of cooking for their retail stores and catering. Meals vary in calories, fat and sodium so it depends on the product and serving size. Chicken Pot Pie is “two servings” in the box (about one pound) provides 940 calories, 18 g protein, 68 g of fat and 1,320 mg of sodium (55% DV). This product is high in total fat, saturated fat, and sodium.



- **Evol:** Offers products with natural ingredients, antibiotic and additive-free and features world cuisine recipes. Most products are lower in calories, total fat and/or sodium but it depends on the product. Chicken Enchilada Bake has 370 calories, 20 g of protein, 6 g of fiber, and 500 mg sodium (22% DV).
- **Healthy Choice®:** Most include a lean source of protein, whole grains, and a serving of vegetables. The variations in the entrée types are based on preparation methods and flavor preference.
- **Hungry-Man:** Offers a line of “dinners” and “Selects” entrees designed to satisfy a good appetite. They are not low in fat, saturated fat, or sodium. Selects Mesquite Flavored Classic Fried Chicken meal has 1,050 calories, 72 g fat, 14 g saturated fat (70% DV), 44 g protein, and 2,060 mg sodium (86% DV). The serving weighs about a pound. This product is high in calories, total fat and saturated fat, and sodium.
- **Kashi:** Offers products that generally have no additives and are high in fiber and low in sodium. Some have more or less added sugars and protein will vary. Chimichurri Quinoa Bowl contains 240 calories, 9 g protein, 12 g of fiber, and 330 mg sodium (13% DV).
- **Lean Cuisine®:** Offers many varieties of entrées based on taste and meal style such as Origins™, More Cuisine™, Marketplace™, Comfort™, and Favorites™. Most meals are around 300 calories. Most of these lines contain vegetarian options.
- **Love the Wild:** Offers a variety of sustainable and “earth friendly” seafood meal kits that are low in calories, fat, and sodium. The Baja Style Fish Taco Bowl has 320 calories, 16 g protein, and 580 mg sodium (25% DV).
- **Luvo:** Offers a line of meals that follow the Mediterranean style of eating and are low in sodium and added sugars. Chicken Chile Verde bowl provides 290 calories, 20 g protein, 7 g fiber, and 490 mg sodium (20% DV).
- **Marie Callender’s:** Offers a variety of products from dinners, bowls, pot pies, and desserts. Meals vary in calories, fat, and sodium so it depends on the product and serving size. Cheesy Chicken & Bacon Pot Pie has 1,020 calories for two servings, 32 g protein, 64 g of fat, 28 g saturated fat (140% DV), and 1440 mg sodium (60% DV)
- **Michelin’s:** Offers a variety of products from dinners, bowls, Zap’ems, and “Lean Gourmet.” The “Lean” ones are lower in calories, fat, and sodium compared to their other products.
- **Saffron Road:** Offers Halal-certified, antibiotic free and humanely raised frozen entrées, bowls, snacks, and other foods using regional recipes from around the world. Most products are low in calories, the fat and/or sodium will vary depending on the product. Teriyaki Chicken With Soba Noodles provides 280 calories, 18 g protein, 10 g fat, and 510 mg sodium (21% DV)



- **Smart Ones®:** Most meals are around 250 calories and some of them contain Weight Watcher® points listed on the package. Smart Ones® offers products from Italian, American, Asian, and vegetarian types for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.



- **SmartMade:** Offers meals with no artificial flavors or preservatives, using home style ingredients and cooking techniques. Chicken with Spinach Fettuccine contains 230 calories, 6 g fat, 22 g protein, 2 g fiber, and 630 mg sodium. (26% DV)



- **Stouffer's:** Offers a variety of products from bowls, “Classic” meals, “Simply Crafted”, “Fit Kitchen” healthier meals, and family size entrees. Meals vary in calories, fat, and sodium so it depends on the product and serving size.

Fettuccini Alfredo (“Classic” meal) has 630 calories, 15 g protein, 31 g fat, 12 g saturated fat (39% DV), and 840 mg sodium (35% DV).

The Fit Kitchen Cali Chicken has 340 calories, 24 g protein, 11 g fat, 2 g saturated fat (10% DV), 7 g fiber, and 570 mg sodium (24% DV).



- **Trader Joe's** offers many frozen convenience foods from desserts to entrees and meal packs. Meals vary in calories, fat, and sodium so it depends on the product and serving size. Chicken Burrito Bowl has 380 calories, 22 g protein, 10 g fat, 4.5 g saturated fat (23% DV), 9 g fiber, and 630 mg sodium (27% DV).

**Many frozen meals like these are available in your grocery store. Having choices allows you to experience food with unique flavors and from different cultures that also match your dietary needs. Now that you know how to select healthier choices, all that is left to say is enjoy!**

**Newsletter References:**

- The Best Frozen Dinners, Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD, WebMD <https://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/features/best-frozen-dinners#1>
- Shopping for Health: Guide to Frozen Meals, Sarah A. Glenny and Wendy J. Dahl Univ. of Florida Cooperative Extension. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FS/FS18600.pdf>
- The Daily Meal: The Healthiest and Unhealthiest Frozen Dinners, Holly Van Hare <https://www.thedailymeal.com/eat/healthiest-unhealthiest-frozen-dinners>

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For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304**



**Do you have a questions or concerns about what to eat?**  
If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

**Check out our website for nutrition resources:  
<http://ccschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors>**

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