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Convenience Food Tips

By Kirsten Hawkins

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

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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.

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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.

Kirsten Hawkins is a nutrition and health expert from Nashville, TN. Visit

<http://www.popular-diets.com/>

for more great nutrition, well-being, and vitamin tips as well as reviews and comments on popular diets.

How Does The Food You Eat And Drinks You Drink Affect Your Health Insurance?

By Elizabeth Newberry

We Americans love our food and drinks, don't we? It seems like with every turn of your car's steering wheel, there's a McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, Hardees, KFC - well, the list of fast food restaurants could go on forever. The point is, they keep popping up all over the place because of consumer demand. We want the cheap, fast food and drinks offered by these fast food restaurants, and we want them everywhere. It's all about cheap convenience.

However, the convenience of this cheap, fast food and drinks can actually come with quite a high price - poor health. Eating this food, such as greasy cheese burgers and salty French fries, and drinking these drinks, such as high calorie sodas, may be alright in moderation, but many Americans have

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made cruising through one or two of these drive-thrus a weekly, or even daily, ritual. Americans are on the go, day in and day out, and these easily accessible restaurants are too tempting to pass up.

Yet, too much of this kind of food and drinks can lead to high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and obesity, just to name a few of the health problems, and when we develop health problems, we either rely on our health insurance to bail us out, or wish we had health insurance in the first place. By avoiding this kind of food and drinks, or at least only indulging in moderation, we can avoid these health complications.

It is always wise to have a good health insurance policy, even if it means purchasing an individual health insurance policy if your employer doesn't offer a health insurance package; however, by eating health foods and drinking healthy drinks and exercising, you can help take care of yourself before these kinds of health complications kick in and necessitate health insurance, or at least health insurance coverage for the kinds of health complications that this food and drinks can cause.

<http://www.myquoteguide.com/Car-Tips.shtml>

<http://www.ezquoteguide.com/home/>

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