Dear Alice,

Recently I've been eating a lot of frozen dinners. I like them because they are cheap (about $2.50), easy to make, and help me stick to a reasonable portion size. Are these dinners healthy? How processed are they? Are they considered a well-balanced meal? Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Frozen dinners are great time savers and can sometimes be a part of a well-balanced diet. Many brands produce frozen dinners with appropriate portions of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. When looking for healthy frozen meals, check out the nutrition facts and ingredients on the box to look for vegetables, fruits, beans, legumes, whole grains, lean meat, and low-fat dairy.

Looking at the nutrition facts on the box will also help you determine the serving sizes, the number of servings per container, and also the calorie content of the meal. Some frozen dinners are high in calories and have over a day's worth of fat and saturated fat. Also, many frozen meals, including low-calorie ones, tend to be very high in sodium, where one meal can already meet half your daily sodium intake. Look for reduced or low sodium on packaging and nutrition labels. Also, some frozen dinners also contain preservatives, which can be an indicator that there's hidden sugar, fat, and/or sodium in your meal.

While frozen meals can be part of a healthy diet if you read the labels carefully, it's also good to consider what else you're eating during the course of the day. If you choose to eat frozen dinners on a daily basis, you want to be sure there is variety in the rest of your diet. It's a good idea to supplement frozen meals with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. To learn more about recommended portion sizes and food groups, try using the MyPlate guide and website to help you design your own personalized healthy eating plan.

In addition to keeping portion sizes in check and balancing your nutrient intake, consider what else you might do to stick to eating healthy with every meal. Eat well and enjoy!

Alice!

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