

NUTRITION MENTORING HANDOUT

Making Convenience Foods Healthier in a Pinch

Although store-bought mixed dishes are convenient and quick, they do come with a few downfalls. One of the downfalls with using store-bought mixed dishes is that it can be difficult to know exactly what's in the dish, and in what quantity. You can figure this out by looking at the ingredient list and the nutrition facts table.

What are the benefits of making homemade mixed dishes?

- You know the exact ingredients that are being used
- You are able to reduce the fat, sugar and salt content
- You are able to increase the fibre content
- Buying premade meals usually costs more than preparing them yourself, therefore making homemade dishes helps to save on costs
- You get to experience a great sense of accomplishment when you've prepared a delicious, healthy and homemade meal for yourself and your family – great work!

What about store-bought mixed dishes?

Store-bought mixed dishes should contain at least two of the four food groups based on Canada's Food Guide (although ideally it would contain all four). A few examples of meals that contain two food groups include a yogurt and fruit cup, or a vegetable and hummus dish, or a Shepherd's Pie. Try to choose a dish that has a vegetable listed in the first three ingredients, a source of protein (meat, milk or alternative), and does not contain any trans-fats.

If your store-bought mix does not contain all four food groups, with a bit of creativity you can make it a complete meal. See below for examples.

Examples of making a meal starting with store-bought mixed dishes:

Canned Chili

- Serve with a hot baked potato. Sprinkle with cheese.
- Add a glass of milk and whole grain bun.
- Serve over hot noodles or rice. Top with cheese or serve with a glass of milk.

Canned Tomato Soup

- Prepare with milk. Serve with tuna on a bun or an egg sandwich.
- Top with grated cheese. Serve with crackers, sliced meat and cheese.
- Add frozen vegetables and leftover rice and pasta. Serve with milk or cheese.

Canned Stew

- Serve over rice or noodles with a glass of milk and carrot sticks.

Frozen Pizza

- Top with extra cheese. Serve with a bean salad and vegetables with dip.

Pasta with Cream Sauce

- Add vegetables and a can of tuna or salmon. Serve yogurt for dessert.
- Add chopped ham and sautéed vegetables. Serve with a glass of milk.

Battered Fish

- Serve with rice, a vegetable, and milk.
- Serve in a wrap or pita pocket with vegetables. Serve with yogurt.

Noodle Soups

- Add frozen vegetables and shredded meat as you are preparing. Serve with cheese and whole grain crackers.

Boxed Macaroni and Cheese

- Add grated cheese. Serve with a tossed salad and deviled eggs.
- Add frozen vegetables while cooking noodles. Add chopped ham. Serve with a glass of milk.

Frozen Pasta/Meat Entrees

- Serve with a salad and yogurt.



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