

wellness works today



going frozen

The American Frozen Food Institute reports that the average person in the United States eats six frozen meals a month. Sound like you? Most supermarkets have an entire aisle devoted to frozen meals. The question is—*Are they healthy?* The answer, not so surprisingly, is maybe.

Some of you may remember when frozen meals were referred to as TV dinners. These dinners developed a reputation for being loaded with fat, calories and sodium. Today, however, there are plenty of heart- and waist-friendly selections available.

Some frozen meals may even be a healthier choice than restaurant meals or home-cooked meals because they offer portion control. Frozen meals that are low in fat and have appropriate calorie content can actually teach people healthy portion sizes. In other words, when you're familiar with what a 400-calorie entrée looks like, you'll know how much you should be eating the next time you cook at home or go out for dinner. This is important. For many of us, it's not what we eat but how much we eat that gets us into trouble.

The biggest problem with frozen meals is this: We may be fooled into thinking there isn't much difference between them because they are packaged in similar-sized boxes. In fact, the opposite is true.

Look at the table below. At 790 calories, 40 grams of fat and 1,940 milligrams of sodium, the Brand A fried chicken dinner has **more than twice the calories, more than triple the sodium and almost six times more fat** than the same Brand B meal! If you are trying to lose weight, which meal do you think might get you to your goal quicker?

	Brand A fried chicken dinner	Brand B fried chicken dinner
Calories	790	360
Fat	40 grams	7 grams
Sodium	1,940 mg	600 mg

Here are some hints for choosing heart- and waist-friendly frozen meals.

- Look for frozen meals with labels that include the words "low fat," "low calories" and "low sodium."
- Look for the word "healthy" on the label. Federal law dictates that any foods using the word "healthy" (even in the brand name) must be low in total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.
- Choose products labeled *low sodium, reduced sodium or light in sodium*. Some frozen dinners can be high in sodium/salt.

We know you're busy. With a little planning, you can have both convenience and good nutrition.

fun fitness fact

What is the most important thing to put into your mouth every day? Water!

Although drinking eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily is the standard rule of thumb, you may need more, especially if you exercise intensely in hot weather. One way to calculate your fluid need is to divide your weight in half. This number in ounces is your recommended daily water intake.

children and pool safety reminders

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, an estimated 350 children under age five drown each year in swimming pools—and another 2,600 children under age five are treated in emergency rooms for pool-related incidents. Nationally, drowning is a leading cause of death for children under five.

The key to preventing these tragedies is to have layers of protection. The CPSC offers these tips to prevent drowning:

- ⌚ Fences and walls should be at least four feet high and installed completely around the pool. The fence gates should be self-closing and self-latching. The latch should be out of a small child's reach.
- ⌚ Keep rescue equipment by the pool and be sure a portable phone is poolside with emergency numbers posted.
- ⌚ For above-ground pools, steps and ladders to the pool should be secured and locked, or removed when the pool is not in use.
- ⌚ If a child is missing, always look in the pool first. Seconds count in preventing death or disability.

Computers and your eyes

More and more of us find that we're spending longer amounts of time working with computer screens, whether it is for work-related tasks or for home use. If you're among the 75% of people who do, you've probably had to deal with tired, irritated, watery and itchy eyes, blurred vision and occasional double vision. Luckily, studies have shown that working on a computer screen doesn't cause permanent vision problems.

Here are some tips from the American Optometric Association to help to minimize your eye discomfort.

- Sit so that you are looking at the monitor straight on.
- Place the screen at right angles to any windows to lessen glare.
- Adjust the screen angle to minimize reflections from overhead lights or desk lamps.
- Use drapes, shades or blinds to control window lighting and glare. Vertical or horizontal blinds will direct light away from you and the computer.
- Keep the screen brightness the same or brighter than the brightness of other objects in the room.
- Use an adjustable copy holder to keep reference material at the same height and distance away from you as the computer screen so you don't have to change eye focus.
- Use a glare-reduction filter to enhance screen contrast and increase character legibility. Use a three-sided computer hood if glare continues to be a problem.
- Wipe off the screen frequently with an anti-static cloth.
- Take rest breaks every 15 minutes or so. Look away and focus on a distant object for about two minutes

long-term medication precautions

Have you been taking a prescription medication for more than six months? If you are taking certain types of medications, it's important to have your blood tested at least once every year so your doctor can monitor any side effects. You want to be sure that you can continue taking the drug safely. These medicines include:

- diuretics (fluid pills)
- anti-seizure medications
- blood pressure medications
- some heart medications

Please talk to your doctor about whether you need to be monitored for any long-term medication you are on.

summer health challenge

Summer salads are especially delicious, and a great way to add disease-preventing foods to your diet. Pledge to eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables every day this month. Make sure to include the following:

- **Tomatoes**—Chock full of vitamins A and C, tomatoes also provide 7% to 10% of the recommended daily allowance for iron. They contain the antioxidant lycopene, which may protect against prostate and stomach cancer. When choosing your tomatoes, be sure to pick those with the most brilliant shades of red. These indicate the highest amounts of lycopene.
- **Red peppers**—Think of peppers as a "super vegetable." All varieties are loaded with vitamins and phytochemicals to make us healthy, but red peppers reign supreme because they're loaded with antioxidant vitamins A, C and K. Vitamins A and C help to prevent cell damage, some cancers and diseases related to aging; help to strengthen our immune systems; and may even help with asthma and arthritis. Our bodies use vitamin K for bone health and blood clotting. (If you're taking blood thinners, talk with your doctor before increasing the amount of red peppers you consume).
- **Cranberries**—In a study of 20 commonly eaten fruits, cranberries contained significantly more health-promoting properties than any other fruit measured. While it is widely known that cranberries help prevent urinary tract infection by preventing bacteria from sticking to the lining of the urinary tract, new research has shown that the same properties help reduce bacterial adhesion to teeth, thus reducing the formation of dental plaque.

Wellness Works Today is a quarterly publication by Fallon Community Health Plan's Department of Health Services. This publication does not advance any particular method of treatment, nor does it endorse the management of medical problems without the advice and care of health care professionals. For information about this publication or FCHP's *Wellness Works* program, please call Beth Foley, R.N., M.Ed., Director, Health Services, at 1-508-368-9108.

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