



# DINING ON A DIME

## *Eating Better for Less*

June / July

### What is a Nutrient Dense Food?

People living in the U.S. are encouraged to eat “a variety of nutrient dense foods and beverages.” (This was one of the main recommendations of the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.) But what exactly does “nutrient dense” mean? This issue of *Dining on a Dime* is going to answer that very question!



*Nutrient dense* foods provide many healthy nutrients and few calories per measurement. The phrase *nutrient dense* sounds similar to the term *energy dense*, but they have opposite meanings. *Energy dense* foods usually provide a low amount of healthy nutrients, but many calories and high amounts of refined sugars and fat per serving. Consider the following two examples...

Examples of Nutrient Dense Foods:		Examples of Energy Dense Foods:	
3 ounce baked potato	79 calories	3 ounces regular potato chips	456 calories
8 ounces skim milk	86 calories	8 ounces whole milk	149 calories

The chart above shows that a baked potato provides 377 fewer calories than the same weight of potato chips. A baked potato is a good source of potassium, fiber and vitamins C and B-6, which makes it a more nutrient-dense choice than chips. The second example compares skim milk to whole milk. Both contain the same amount of healthy nutrients. Since the skim milk has 63 fewer calories than the same portion of whole milk, skim milk is more nutrient-dense than whole milk.

Eat plenty of nutrient-dense foods each day, including whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Limit eating energy-dense and the more processed foods. If you often rely on eating convenience foods, turn the page and keep reading! This issue of *Dining on a Dime* offers suggestions to make some of the most popular convenience foods a little healthier.

Source (Accessed 4/30/06): [Tufts Expert Recommends Communicating “Nutrient Density” to Consumers](http://www.nutrition.tufts.edu/news/notes/2006-03.html), Tufts University, [www.nutrition.tufts.edu/news/notes/2006-03.html](http://www.nutrition.tufts.edu/news/notes/2006-03.html)

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## A Better Boxed Meal

Imagine it's late afternoon on a typical weekday. Do you know what you're having for dinner tonight? Most people don't, according to a recent survey. About 70 percent of adults living in the U.S. don't decide what to eat that night until 4 p.m. or later. For a quick meal, many cooks reach for packaged convenience foods. Most of these products are NOT nutrient dense, but rather are low in healthy nutrients and high in sodium, fat and calories. Some convenience foods are much more expensive than homemade recipes, too.

*Dining on a Dime* offers some delicious, quick and easy suggestions to boost the nutrient density of a boxed or frozen packaged convenience food. By following the tips described below, you will increase the taste of your meals — as well as the vitamins, minerals and overall nutritional value. When your family and work schedules don't allow much time for cooking, try these tips!

### **Decrease Fat**

- Use only half the margarine called for in the instructions of boxed mixes of rice, pasta, stuffing, potatoes and macaroni and cheese. Omit all of the margarine for even greater calorie savings.
- Reduce the fat in ground beef when making a hamburger casserole boxed mix. Drain the fat from cooked ground beef. Then place the meat in a colander and rinse with warm water. Drain. Continue with the regular directions.



- Substitute an equal amount of unsweetened applesauce for vegetable oil in boxed brownie mixes. Substitute two egg whites for each whole egg to decrease the fat and calorie content even more.



### **Decrease Sodium**

- Use only half of a seasoning packet for seasoned rice mixes, packaged soup noodles, and frozen stir fry meals. Add the remaining half when cooking plain rice or noodles, or use as a seasoning for slow cooked meats, if desired.

### **Add Nutrients**

- Add chopped vegetables to frozen pizzas before baking.



- Add frozen chopped spinach to tomato-based pasta sauces.
- Add frozen mixed vegetables to canned soups.
- Add drained chunks of canned fruit to gelatin desserts and puddings.
- If a packaged mix calls for milk, use nonfat dry milk powder and water instead. If you use 2/3 cup dry milk and 1 cup water for every cup of milk the package calls for, you will get twice as much calcium as you normally would have.



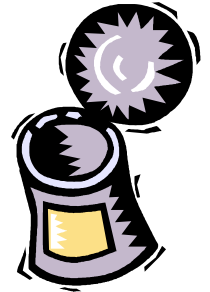
## Safety Concerns for Convenience Foods

This issue of *Dining on a Dime* is dedicated to busy cooks who sometimes use convenience foods when serving meals.

What are some food safety concerns regarding convenience foods? The following tips will help you purchase and store convenience foods safely.

### Canned and Boxed Foods

- Avoid buying canned and boxed foods that show signs of bulging, denting or leaking.
- Store canned and boxed foods in a cool, dry place and for not longer than one year.



### Refrigerated Meats

- Use poultry products purchased from the deli counter within three days of purchase.
- Use meat deli items within seven days of purchase.

### Prepared Foods

- Purchase only fresh-looking food items on salad bars.
- Refrigerate perishable items — such as egg salad, macaroni salad and potato salad — at a temperature below 40 degrees.
- Reheat pre-cooked foods, such as roasted rotisserie chicken. Eat them the same day you purchase them.



### Frozen Foods

- Purchase frozen foods from the back of the freezer at the store. These items tend to be kept the coldest.
- Don't refreeze thawed food items.
- Keep frozen foods tightly wrapped in a freezer at zero degrees or colder. Write the date on each package when you freeze it. Contact your local extension office for a list of recommended freezing times for various food products. Or print the freezer storage chart from the website, [www.oznet.ksu.edu/humannutrition/hrap/storage/freezsto.htm](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/humannutrition/hrap/storage/freezsto.htm)

Source (Accessed 4/13/06): [Home Food Safety Tips](http://www.homefoodsafety.org/pages/tips/tips/conv_safe.jsp), American Dietetic Association, [www.homefoodsafety.org/pages/tips/tips/conv\\_safe.jsp](http://www.homefoodsafety.org/pages/tips/tips/conv_safe.jsp)

This material was funded by USDA's Food Stamp Program through a program awarded by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS). The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your local SRS Service Center or call 1-800-221-5689.



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## Dining on a Dime's Cooks' Corner

### 'Make it a Meal' Macaroni & Cheese (Makes 4 servings)

#### Ingredients

- 1 box macaroni and cheese, any brand
- 2 tablespoons margarine
- 1/4 cup skim milk
- 1 pound frozen broccoli
- 6 ounces canned tuna, packed in water, drained

#### Directions

1. Prepare macaroni and cheese according to box directions, except use 2 tablespoons margarine instead of 4 tablespoons, and use skim milk.
2. Meanwhile, in a separate saucepan, bring 1/2 cup water and broccoli to a boil. Reduce heat to medium. Cover. Simmer broccoli 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain water from broccoli and set aside.
3. Stir together prepared macaroni and cheese and drained broccoli and tuna.
4. Cover and refrigerate leftovers promptly.

Each portion (1 1/2 cups) provides: 320 calories, 8 g fat, 41 g carbohydrate, 23 g protein, 20 mg cholesterol, 640 mg sodium and 4 g dietary fiber.



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