

Choosing healthy convenience meals

While we might be skipping dining at restaurants, pubs and cafes and eating at home more as a result of cost of living pressures, it can be tempting to reach for easy options like takeaway and pre-prepared meals.

Did you know



Many takeaway, home-delivered and frozen meals are high in energy (kilojoules), unwanted saturated fat and salt. This is concerning as [recent research showed](#) Australians spend approximately 32 per cent of their weekly food budget on takeaway and delivered food!

Takeaway food is also low in dietary fibre. A diet rich in dietary fibre can protect your heart by reducing cholesterol levels in the blood, improving blood glucose levels, blood pressure and weight – all of which are risk factors for heart disease.

Protect your heart



There are however, some better options out there when you need a break from the kitchen. Here are some tips to help you choose the healthiest option.



Takeaway and delivery

- Choose restaurants with several healthy choices on the menu.
- Add colour by basing meals around extra vegies or salads.
- Try to avoid beige-coloured foods like burgers, pizzas or pastas, as these will be low in fibre and high in unhealthy carbohydrates and fat.
- Choose healthier cooking methods such as grilled, steamed or braised dishes.
- Split serves in half and enjoy leftovers the next day with an extra serve of salad or vegetables.
- Avoid options with butter, cream, pastries or fried foods. Remember to go easy on sauces and condiments too.
- Choose water over sugary soft drinks or milkshakes. This is an easy way to save kilojoules and money.

DIETITIAN TIP

Serve up stir-fries, noodles or curry dishes onto a plate (rather than eating straight from the container). Takeaway portion sizes are often very generous so try to save some for the next meal or day.

For more help choosing healthier takeaway options, go to:

baker.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets/healthy-eating-out-take-away 🌟



Meal kits and grocery boxes



- Home delivered meal kits and grocery boxes have grown in popularity and are a great way to reduce food wastage and limit trips to the supermarket.
- When making meals from a grocery box, it's best to use the [healthy plate guide](#) – ½ plate of non-starchy vegetables, ¼ low GI carbohydrates and ¼ plate for lean protein.
- [A University of Sydney study](#) found some meal kits can contain four times the recommended amounts of kilojoules, saturated fat and salt.

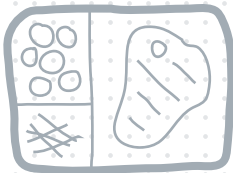


DIETITIAN TIP

To improve the nutrition of your meal kit, try stretching a two-person kit to last up to three to four meals by bulking it up with extra vegetables. Also, try to use half the recommended amount of rich, creamy dressings and sauces.



Pre-prepared and frozen meals



- Use the [healthy plate guide](#), add your own salad or frozen vegetables to increase the vegetable portion of the meal.
- You can purchase protein-only meals and add your own vegetables (salad or frozen vegetables) and low GI carbohydrates such as basmati rice, pasta or a multigrain wrap.
- Healthier options include Dineamic, which can be ordered online, and the Lean Cuisine and SuperNature range, which can be found in supermarkets.




DIETITIAN TIP

When choosing a pre-prepared meal, make sure to read the nutritional information panel, see our guide below.

For more help choosing healthier convenience meals, go to:

baker.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets/convenience-meals 🌟

What to look out for on nutritional information panels



- Less than 2500kJ (600cal), or less than 1700kJ (400cal) if you're trying to lose weight
- More than 20g protein
- Less than 20g total fat
- Less than 5g saturated fat
- More than 6g fibre
- Less than 500mg sodium.

This resource was produced by the Allied Health and Education Service team at the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Top three takeaway choices by cuisine



Indian

- Tikka or tandoori dishes
- Tomato based curry e.g. vindaloo
- Lentils, chickpeas based curries.

Japanese and Korean

- Sushi — vegetable, fish, prawn, egg, tofu, seaweed, avocado
- Steamed gyoza, mandu (dumplings)
- Steamed rice, soba (buckwheat) noodle.

Thai and Vietnamese

- Rice paper rolls
- Noodle soup e.g. Pho or Tom Yum Soup

- Salads with lean meat, skinless chicken, seafood and plenty of vegetables and herbs, papaya salad.

Chinese

- Steamed dumplings, bao
- Broth based soups, chicken and corn soup
- Steamed, braised, stir fried — fish, seafood, lean meat, skinless chicken, tofu with vegetables.

Mexican

- Burrito, fajita, soft taco, quesadilla
- Salsa, guacamole, lime
- Grilled corn cob.

Middle Eastern and Greek

- Baked stuffed vegetables (capsicum, tomato, zucchini, or eggplant) filled with rice, minced meat, lentil and vegetable
- Kofte (minced lamb with cracked wheat)
- Pita bread with tzatziki, baba ganoush or hummus dips.

Italian and Spanish

- Paella with seafood / vegetables
- Small, thin crust pizza with vegetable toppings
- Bruschetta (tomato and basil).