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9 Packaged Foods You Can Feel Good About



Overview

While there is a trend toward eating “clean” – avoiding packaged foods full of preservatives and unpronounceable ingredients -- never eating out of a package is not realistic for most people. If you eat on the go even once in a while, knowing how to choose healthy packaged foods is key to your health and waistline. Frozen and canned (BPA-free) foods also help when preparing a last-minute meal. “I am glad to see the trend toward ‘real food’ and avoiding highly processed foods. While it is ideal to strive to eat a mostly whole-foods diet, enjoying a moderate amount of packaged foods with clean ingredients is still an acceptable and good way to go,” says Michelle Dudash, RDN, author of “Clean Eating for Busy Families.” To help you navigate the overwhelming supermarket shelves, here are nine packaged products in different categories that taste good and are good for you -- providing a simple, quality, whole-food ingredient list.

1. Salty Snack: Annie Chun's Roasted Seaweed Snacks | Skip the potato chips and get your crunch on with nutrient-rich seaweed snacks. Seaweed snacks have been a staple of the Korean diet for centuries and are now becoming popular in America. Seaweed snacks provide a variety of health benefits, including being high in vitamins and minerals like vitamins A and C, and low in calories (just 30 calories for 10 sheets). Providing a simple, recognizable ingredient list, Annie Chun's Sesame Seaweed Snack has just four ingredients: seaweed, canola oil, sesame oil and salt. And while these lightly seasoned roasted sheets of nori will satisfy the most serious salty-snack craving, the sodium content is actually quite low -- providing just three percent of your daily value of sodium per serving. A popular snack for kids as well as adults, flavors include Sesame, Wasabi, Brown Sugar & Sea Salt and Cracked Pepper & Herbs.

2. Nut Butter: Maisie Jane's Almond Butter | Next time you're choosing a nut butter look at the ingredient list. Many leading brands of peanut butter include sugar as the second ingredient after peanuts, followed by vegetable oils and other fillers. This can be true for any type of nut butter -- including almond, walnut or hazelnut. “When I look for an almond butter the only ingredient I want to see is almonds. I love Maisie Jane's because it has zero grams of sodium, and nothing else bad in it; the jar contains only almonds,” says Keri Gans, RDN, author of “The Small Change Diet.” Almonds are rich in monounsaturated fats, which may help prevent heart disease. A one-ounce serving of Maisie Jane's Almond Butter provides six grams of healthy fats, three grams of fiber and is an excellent source of vitamin E and magnesium. “I like to add a little almond butter to my oatmeal for extra protein and healthy fat to keep me satiated until lunchtime,” adds Gans.

3. Frozen Entree: Amy's Brown Rice Black-Eyed Peas and Lentils | Amy's Brown Rice Black-Eyed Peas and Lentils dinners were first introduced in the 1950s as a post-war trend, capitalizing on the newfound lure of television. The recipe is a classic, featuring a tender, succulent sirloin steak, fried chicken or marinated, coupled with green beans and a side of rice.

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- 3. Frozen Entree: Amy's Brown Rice Black-Eyed Peas and Veggies Bowl** | TV dinners were first introduced in the 1950s as a post-war trend, capitalizing on the newfound lure of television. Unfortunately, the Salisbury steak, fried chicken or meatloaf coupled with green peas and a special dessert provided little in the way of wholesome, whole-food nutrition. While there are still plenty of highly processed frozen entrees available today, there are some frozen-food brands creating convenient products with a clean ingredient list. "Frozen entrees with whole-food ingredients that you'd find in your pantry are a quick way to enjoy a square meal with whole grains, lean protein and vegetables. Some of my favorite brands are Amy's, Organic Bistro and many of Trader Joe's private labels. The brands in your natural-food section are usually your best bet -- and the best-tasting," says Michelle Dudash, RDN. One of Dudash's favorite entrees is Amy's Brown Rice Black-Eyed Peas and Veggies Bowl, made with a combination of organic brown rice and black-eyed peas with organic broccoli and carrots in a tasty ginger sauce, providing eight grams of fiber and 11 grams of protein per serving.

4. Cereal and Oatmeal: Love Grown Foods | If you're overwhelmed in the cereal aisle, you're probably not alone. It seems like every day there are new cereals to choose from with claims such as "high fiber" and "whole grain" to try to sway you to purchase them. For a tasty bowl that provides high-quality, simple ingredients, a good choice is Love Grown Foods. Whether you choose the Super Oats, Hot Oats, Oat Clusters or Power O's, all Love Grown Foods are free of genetically modified ingredients, high-fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated oils. For example, Love Grown Foods Super Oats have only four simple ingredients: gluten-free oats, chia seeds, quinoa and amaranth. Plus, it has zero grams of sugar and five grams of fiber per serving. In comparison, a packet of a popular brand of instant oatmeal has 12 grams of sugar and three grams of fiber. Since the Super Oats are unsweetened, you can customize them as you like. Try adding berries or other sliced fruit rather than sugar for some natural sweetness.

5. Chips: Popchips Veggie Chips | Let's face it, sometimes you just want chips. You don't want pretzels, baby carrots or celery sticks – you want a real chip. When that chip craving hits, a better-for-you chip fix are never-fried veggie Popchips. They have all the flavor and half the fat of fried chips and blend nine popular vegetables: potato, chickpea, navy bean, beet, spinach, pumpkin, pea, tomato, red bell pepper and kale. Like all Popchips, veggie Popchips have no fake colors or flavors. A one-ounce serving is 23 chips and provides 120 calories, three grams of fiber, three grams of protein and 3.5 grams of fat. In comparison, a one-ounce serving of fried chips is about 15 chips and has 160 calories, 10 grams of fat and one gram of fiber. Veggie Popchips come in three flavors: Sea Salt, Hint of Olive Oil and Tuscan Herb.

6. Frozen Vegetables: Earthbound Farm Organic | Eating vegetables each day is one of the best things you can do for your health. Consuming plenty of produce will help reduce your risk of chronic diseases and keep your weight in check. Unfortunately, most of us don't get enough. A good rule of thumb is to fill half your plate with veggies. One way to do that, especially on busy days, is to stock your freezer with an array of frozen vegetables. "Frozen vegetables are an excellent way to boost your veggie intake by just grabbing and tossing into your favorite dishes. Look for those with no added salt or sauces. Plain frozen vegetables are picked at their peak and frozen within days of harvesting," says Michelle Dudash, RDN. One of Dudash's favorite frozen vegetable brands is Earthbound Farm Organic, which has only one organic ingredient – the vegetable itself. Try adding frozen veggies to your soup or stir-fry, or heat some up as a simple side dish with a drizzle of olive oil and your favorite herbs.

7. Nuts: Wonderful Pistachios A handful of nuts are often a good snack choice. "Nuts of all kinds are rich in protein, potassium and fiber," says Michelle Dudash, RDN. Although nuts are a healthy and clean option by themselves, they can quickly sabotage your noble intentions when paired with fatty or sugary toppings. "Look for those with less added salt and avoid those with added sugar and oil," advises Dudash. A winner in the clean-snacking category for nuts is Wonderful Pistachios, which has just two ingredients: pistachios and sea salt. Plus, research shows eating in-shell pistachios can create a more mindful snacking experience, helping people eat less and feel just as satisfied. Pistachios offer a combination of protein, fiber and healthy fats to keep you full until your next meal, and you get approximately 49 nuts per serving.

8. Canned Produce: Eden Organic Crushed Tomatoes | Canned fruits and vegetables are not just budget-friendly and convenient, they may also be healthier than you think. While some produce lose nutrients during canning, other produce (such as tomatoes) release antioxidants due to the heating process, so their healthy components increase. Another benefit of canned tomatoes is that you can always have them in your house, especially in the winter when they're not in season. When possible, choose a can that is free of bisphenol A (BPA), an ingredient that's often used to coat food cans and is a known endocrine disruptor. While the Environmental Protection Agency still deems cans safe, it is encouraging other options. Eden Organic Crushed Tomatoes come in BPA-free cans and have just one ingredient: organic Roma tomatoes. Tomatoes are rich in nutrients, including lycopene (which is more readily absorbed from cooked tomatoes than raw ones) and the antioxidant vitamin C (which may help prevent certain cancers).

9. Snack Bar: SoyJoy | The number of snack bars available in the past decade has skyrocketed. While some offer a healthy on-the-go option to keep you fueled until your next meal, all too many are highly processed and loaded with excess sugar and fillers. A nutritious option is SoyJoy, which has a simple, all-natural ingredient list. The bars are baked with pieces of real fruit and non-GMO ground whole soybeans. Plus, the protein in soybeans provides all nine essential amino acids, making them a source of high-quality, plant-based protein. The bars are also certified gluten-free and come in a variety of tasty flavors. When craving something decadent, try heating a dark-chocolate cherry SoyJoy bar in the microwave for eight to 10 seconds to get a delicious, better-for-you treat.

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