



# Mealtime Mentoring

December 2008

## Making Convenience Foods Healthier in a Pinch

*Tasty foods can come combined in great mixed dishes.  
Store shelves contain many choices, but are they healthy choices?*

### Homemade mixed dishes

Making homemade mixed dishes allows you to know what ingredients are being used and to choose to reduce the fat, sugar and salt while increasing the fibre in your ingredient choices or cooking methods.

The Canada's Food Guide servings provided by the recipe will be determined by the major ingredients you put in the mixed dish. For example, Shepherd's Pie, made with meat and potatoes may provide choices from two food groups, the Vegetables and Fruit and Meat and Alternatives.



### Store-bought mixed dishes

The food content in store-bought mixed dishes may vary. Store-bought mixed dishes should contain two or more food groups, based on Canada's Food Guide. Look at the ingredients listed to determine which food groups they provide.

Try to choose a mixed dish with a vegetable listed in the first three ingredients. As well, the product should provide a meat, milk or alternative as a source or protein. Avoid trans fats.

### Do mixed dishes provide a full meal?

Mixed dishes may contain one or more servings of a food group, based on Canada's Food Guide, or it may only contain part of a serving. Read the recipe for homemade items, or ingredient list for store-bought items. For store-bought items, you may have to speculate until you purchase the item and see. You will know for next time.

First, if a prepared mixed dish does not include all four food groups, add them on to complete the meal. For example, if your mixed dish is shepherd's pie made with hamburger and potatoes, serve it with milk and a whole grain bun.

Secondly, if, after reading the ingredient list or recipe, it seems that the quantity of one food group is small, add to it. For example, if a chicken and pasta dish contains just a small amount of vegetables, but not enough to be a serving, you can add more vegetable as you are cooking to ensure a serving of vegetables is in the dish or serve extra vegetable on the side. One cup of canned vegetable soup may only contain a partial serving of vegetables.

Adapted from: Healthy Foods for My School  
Ministry of Health, 2008

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## Making a Meal Starting with Store-Bought Mixed Dishes

### Canned Chili

- Serve on 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 Pasta/Meat Entrees

- Serve with a salad and yogurt.

### 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.

### Frozen Pizza

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

### 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 devilled eggs.
- Add frozen vegetables while cooking noodles. Add chopped ham. Serve with a glass of milk.



## Be cautious of highly processed foods

Less healthy choices are foods high in fat, sugar or salt and lower in fibre. They are often foods that have been highly processed. Encourage children to enjoy the natural wholesome flavour of nutrient packed food.

Some foods should be limited to no more than a total of three times a week in your food selection and menus (not three times for each food). These are:

cakes	frozen desserts	pastries
commercial muffins	fruit flavoured drinks	potato chips
cookies	granola bars	soft drinks
doughnuts	ice cream	sport and energy drinks
French fries	nachos/other salted snacks	sweetened hot/cold drinks

*Helping you provide healthy food and a positive eating environment  
in early learning and child care settings.*