

Healthy Shortcuts: Your Guide to Healthy Convenience Foods

The start of the school year can be a busy time for families, and healthy meals can be quick and delicious. Below you'll find lots of healthy convenience food options, quick meal ideas, grab-and-go options, and simple recipes **to make meal planning and prep easier during the busy school year.**

How to Choose Better Convenience Foods

When shopping, keep these simple guidelines in mind:

Prioritize protein. Look for options like eggs, Greek yogurt, chicken, fish, beans, or cottage cheese, then build the rest of the meal around it.

Keep frozen fruits and vegetables on hand. They're convenient, last longer, and can be just as nutritious as fresh.

Include produce whenever you can. Adding a fruit or vegetable is an easy way to add fiber, vitamins, and minerals to a meal or snack.

Compare similar products. When choosing between packaged options, check the Nutrition Facts label for things like protein, fiber, added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. Make sure they align with your personal lifestyle and needs.

Check the ingredients. Look for foods made with lots of recognizable, whole-food ingredients. Choose options with fewer unnecessary additives, artificial colors, flavors, and added sweeteners when possible.



Stock Your Kitchen with Healthy Shortcuts

Proteins

- Rotisserie chicken
- Greek yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Frozen shrimp
- Chicken sausage
- Canned tuna or salmon
- Frozen turkey burgers
- Black beans
- Deli turkey
- Cheese

Healthy Fats

- Avocados
- Hummus
- Nuts or seeds
- Peanut or nut butter
- Olive oil



Fruits & Vegetables

- Bagged salad
- Steam-in-bag vegetables
- Frozen stir-fry vegetables
- Baby spinach
- Frozen berries
- Fresh fruit
- Baby carrots
- Cucumbers
- Cherry tomatoes
- Snap peas
- Bell peppers

Healthy Carbohydrates

- Potatoes
- Sweet potatoes
- Microwaveable brown rice
- Protein pasta
- Whole wheat tortillas
- Whole grain bread
- Whole grain crackers
- Oat

Quick & Easy Dinner Ideas

Rotisserie Chicken Dinner

Rotisserie chicken + steam-in-bag broccoli + microwave potato + olive oil or butter

Shrimp Stir-Fry

Frozen shrimp + frozen stir-fry vegetables + microwave brown rice + soy sauce

Protein Pasta Bowl

Protein pasta + marinara sauce + chicken sausage + Parmesan cheese

Turkey Burger Plate

Turkey burger + steam-in-bag broccoli + microwave sweet potato

Mediterranean Plate

Canned tuna + hummus + cucumbers + cherry tomatoes + whole wheat pita

Black Bean Taco Bowl

Black beans + microwave brown rice + salsa + bagged salad + avocado

Breakfast for Dinner

Scrambled eggs + baby spinach + whole grain toast + fruit

Salmon Rice Bowl

Canned salmon + microwave brown rice + baby spinach + avocado + soy sauce

Chicken Quesadilla

Rotisserie chicken + whole wheat tortilla + shredded cheese + baby spinach + salsa



Grab-and-Go Ideas

Breakfast

Greek Yogurt Bowl

Greek yogurt + berries + walnuts + chia seeds

Overnight Oats

Oats + Greek yogurt + milk + berries + cinnamon

Egg Breakfast Box

Hard-boiled eggs + fruit + almonds

Protein Toast

Whole grain toast + peanut butter + banana

Smoothie

Greek yogurt + frozen berries + baby spinach + milk

Cottage Cheese Bowl

Cottage cheese + peaches or berries + pumpkin seeds

Lunch

Turkey Wrap

Turkey + cheese + baby spinach + whole wheat tortilla + mustard

Tuna Lunch Box

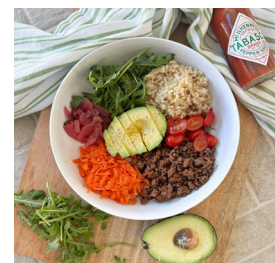
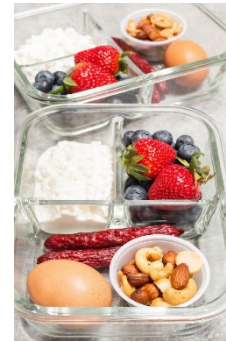
Tuna packet + whole grain crackers + apple + baby carrots

Chicken Hummus Wrap

Rotisserie chicken + hummus + baby spinach + whole wheat tortilla

Leftover Power Bowl

Leftover protein + leftover vegetables + microwave brown rice



Recipes

BBQ Chicken Sweet Potato Bowl

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Servings: 1

Ingredients

- 1 medium sweet potato
- 4 oz rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 1 cup steam-in-bag broccoli florets
- 2 Tbsp barbecue sauce



Directions

1. Pierce the sweet potato several times with a fork and microwave for 5–8 minutes, or until tender.
 2. Microwave the broccoli according to the package directions.
 3. Place the rotisserie chicken in a microwave-safe bowl, stir in the barbecue sauce, and heat for 1–2 minutes.
 4. Split the sweet potato open and top with the barbecue chicken. Serve with the broccoli.
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10-Minute Shrimp Stir-Fry

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Servings: 2

Ingredients

- 12 oz frozen cooked shrimp, thawed
- 1 bag (12–16 oz) frozen stir-fry vegetables
- 2 cups microwaveable brown rice
- 2 Tbsp low-sodium soy sauce or tamari



- 1 tsp sesame oil (optional)
- Sesame seeds or green onions for garnish (optional)

Directions

1. Cook the rice according to package directions.
 2. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the vegetables and cook for 5–6 minutes.
 3. Stir in the shrimp and cook until heated through, about 2–3 minutes.
 4. Add soy sauce and sesame oil, if using. Serve over the rice.
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Protein Pasta with Chicken Sausage

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- 8 oz protein pasta
- 4 fully cooked chicken sausages, sliced
- 2 cups marinara sauce
- 3 cups baby spinach
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese (optional)
- Fresh basil or parsley (optional)



Directions

1. Cook the pasta according to package directions.
 2. While the pasta cooks, heat the sliced chicken sausage in a skillet for 3–4 minutes.
 3. Add the marinara sauce and baby spinach. Simmer for 2–3 minutes, until the spinach is wilted and the sauce is warmed through.
 4. Toss with the cooked pasta and top with Parmesan, if desired.
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Mediterranean Tuna Pita

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Servings: 2

Ingredients

- 2 (5 oz) cans tuna, drained
- ¼ cup plain Greek yogurt or mayonnaise
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- ¼ cup diced cucumber
- ¼ cup halved cherry tomatoes
- 2 Tbsp chopped red onion
- 2 whole wheat pitas
- Baby spinach



Directions

1. In a bowl, combine the tuna, Greek yogurt or mayonnaise, and lemon juice.
2. Stir in the cucumber, tomatoes, and red onion.
3. Fill each pita with baby spinach and the tuna mixture.

Sources

Li L, Pegg RB, Eitenmiller RR, Chun JY, Kerrihard AL. Selected nutrient analyses of fresh, fresh-stored, and frozen fruits and vegetables. *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis*. 2017;59:8–17. doi:10.1016/j.jfca.2017.02.002.

American Heart Association. Can Processed Foods Be Part of a Healthy Diet? Guidance on using Nutrition Facts labels and ingredient lists and choosing healthier frozen, canned, and packaged foods.