

Help with Dinner, the Healthy Way

Meal Helpers Nutrition Comparison

As with all *EN* comparisons, this is only a sampling of what's available. Products are listed alphabetically.

✓ = **EN's Picks.** Picks contain no more than 16 g fat (25% DV), 5 g sat fat (25% DV), and 640 mg sodium (27% DV), and at least 19 g protein (38% DV).

	Serv Size	Cal	Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Pro (g)	Fiber (g)	Carb (g)
BOXED								
Annie's Homegrown Organic Beef Stroganoff	46 g/1 c	360	18.5	8.5	760	18	1	32
Annie's Homegrown Organic Cheddar & Herb Chicken	41 g/1 c	450	21.5	7	880	20	2	45
Annie's Homegrown Organic Cheeseburger Macaroni	37 g/1 c	400	22.5	9	600	23	1	26
Annie's Homegrown Organic Cheesy Lasagna	45 g/1 c	440	24	9	830	25	1	32
Annie's Homegrown Organic Tuna Spirals	57 g/1 c	320	8.5	5	930	22	2	39
✓ Betty Crocker Asian Chicken Helper Chicken Fried Rice	28 g/1 c	280	11	2	390	26	<1	21
Betty Crocker Chicken Helper Creamy Chicken & Noodles	28 g/1 c	280	9	2.5	750	25	<1	24
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Classic Beef Pasta	30 g/1 c	280	11	4.5	760	21	1	23
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Classic Cheeseburger Macaroni	32 g/1 c	310	12	5	910	22	<1	27
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Classic Stroganoff	31 g/1 c	320	13	6	860	23	<1	27
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Classic Three Cheese	34 g/1 c	320	13	5	750	23	1	29
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Italian Cheesy Italian Shells	34 g/1 c	310	13	5	820	22	1	28
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Italian Four Cheese Lasagna	30 g/1 c	300	12	5	800	21	<1	25
Betty Crocker Hamburger Helper Italian Tomato Basil Penne	41 g/1 c	300	11	4	710	20	1	31
Betty Crocker Mexican Crunchy Taco	41 g/1 c	340	15	5	890	20	1	32
Betty Crocker Tuna Helper Classic Creamy Broccoli	36 g/1 c	260	10	3	830	15	1	29
Betty Crocker Tuna Helper Classic Creamy Parmesan	36 g/1 c	270	10	3	810	15	1	30
✓ Good Earth Restaurant Favorites Herb Crusted Chicken with Mushroom Risotto	42 g	300	12	2	540	23	1	25
✓ Good Earth Restaurant Favorites Tuscan Chicken	45 g	300	11	2	620	24	3	26
Romano's Macaroni Grill Restaurant Favorites Chicken Alfredo with Linguine	44 g/1 c	310	11	5	710	26	<1	27
✓ Romano's Macaroni Grill Restaurant Favorites Creamy Basil Parmesan Chicken & Pasta	44 g/1 c	300	11	4.5	590	26	1	26
✓ Wanchai Ferry Restaurant Favorites Kung Pao Chicken	65 g/1 c	320	9	1.5	640	23	1	36
✓ Wanchai Ferry Restaurant Favorites Sweet & Sour Chicken	88 g/1 c	300	7	1.5	310	19	<1	40
FROZEN								
Bertolli Chicken Florentine & Farfalle	340 g	570	31	17	1070	25	4	40
Bertolli Chicken Parmigiana & Penne	340 g	480	21	6	1460	23	4	49
Bertolli Mediterranean Style Chicken, Rigatoni, & Broccoli	340 g	380	15	4	970	22	4	37
Bertolli Shrimp, Asparagus, & Penne	340 g	420	16	8	1000	18	3	50
Bertolli Tuscan-Style Braised Beef with Gold Potatoes	340 g	310	11	2.5	920	16	3	35
Birds Eye Voila! Alfredo Chicken	205 g/1 c	280	12	7	600	14	2	27
Birds Eye Voila! Cheesy Chicken	227 g/1 c	250	6	3	830	14	3	35
Contessa General Tsao Shrimp with Sauce	248 g	280	1.5	0	750	11	3	55
Contessa Microsteam Shrimp Scampi & Linguini	227 g/1 c	360	14	8	520	14	4	43
Contessa Sesame Chicken with Sauce	269 g	280	5	1	750	15	4	45
Romano's Macaroni Grill Basil Parmesan Chicken	340 g/1 ½ c	460	21	12	1060	30	4	44
Romano's Macaroni Grill Spicy Italian Sausage Pomodoro	340 g/1 ½ c	460	21	7	820	20	6	48
Stouffers Sautés for Two Braised Beef and Portobello Tortelloni	340 g/½ bag	370	15	8	880	22	3	36
Stouffers Sautés for Two Cajun Style Shrimp Alfredo	340 g/½ bag	400	16	10	940	17	4	46
Stouffers Sautés for Two Grilled Chicken and Asiago Tortelloni	326 g/½ bag	570	30	14	1000	31	4	44
Stouffers Sautés for Two Steak Gorgonzola	340 g/½ bag	730	26	14	950	34	5	90
Tai Pei Stir Fry Creations Chicken Fried Rice	340 g	420	8	1.5	1560	22	2	66
Tai Pei Stir Fry Creations Crispy General Tso's Chicken	340 g	440	9	1.5	710	16	3	74

Note: g=gram, mg=milligram, sat fat=saturated fat, carb=carbohydrates, oz=ounces; Source: product labels.

There are some people who cook every meal from scratch, and there are others who eat every meal in a restaurant. But most fall somewhere in between these two extremes. And, for that majority, there are nights when neither extreme is an option. Those are the nights when a little extra help from the store is needed. You want to cook your meal, but need all the prep—cutting, seasoning, and sauce-making—to be done for you. That's when those handy-dandy "helper" boxes or frozen skillet meals in your grocery store come to the rescue. It used to be that you were limited to a frozen bag of chicken and noodles or a box mix, to which you just added ground beef, but today your choices include options for chicken, tuna, shrimp, steak, and even vegetarian. Many of these meals tend to be high in sodium and/or fat, and too low in veggie content to be considered a healthy dinner on a regular basis, but a few can occasionally fit into a healthy eating plan.

Helpful hints. Next time you find yourself hitting the grocery store a half an hour before you need to get dinner on the table, keep these tips in mind to make your "I need help" dinner as healthy as possible.

- **Add some color.** Many of these meals fall short on the fruit and veggie offerings. While dinner simmers away, chop some veggies for a simple salad, get some fruit washed and ready to eat, and steam some frozen (or heat up some canned) veggies to go along side. Just watch the amount of sodium if you're using canned vegetables.

- **Check the serving size.** For some people, it may seem these speedy meals are made for one, but in reality, most contain anywhere from two to five servings. So, if you're getting fewer servings than the package says, keep in mind that you're getting more calories, fat, sodium, and everything else, too.

- **Do it yourself.** Sure, these meals are super convenient, but it doesn't take much longer to make your own healthier version from scratch. Using brown rice or whole grain pasta as a base (make ahead in big batches, then just rinse with hot water and drain to freshen before warming up), stir in your favorite steamed veggies, and cooked lean ground beef, shrimp, or diced skinless chicken, along with your favorite seasonings. **EN**

—Heidi McIndoo, M.S., R.D.