



Supermarket Guide

Spice Things Up, the Healthy Way

Tortillas, cilantro, salsa, cheese, and oh, those peppers!—the familiar foods of Mexican cuisine can make your mouth water just thinking about them. Yet cooking these foods from scratch can be time consuming. When you're in the mood for a taste of old Mexico in minutes, a wide assortment of Mexican convenience foods is available in supermarket shelves. Many require little more than cooking up some meat and putting all the ingredients together, while others are ready to heat-and-eat meals from the refrigerator or freezer case. But how do these products stack up health-wise?

As Americans do with most international foods, we've put our own spin on Mexican food. In fact, the layers of ooey-goey cheese, hot spices, and sour cream many of us associate with Mexican foods are really more Tex-Mex than plain Mex. And of course, these sauces and cheeses tend to bump up the calories, fat and sodium content of many dishes. Never fear, there are still many Mexican-inspired convenience foods you can pick up at your local supermarket that won't break your nutritional bank.

Helpful hints. To enjoy some south of the border flavor when time is short—and keep your healthy eating plan in line—check out *EN*'s picks on our chart.

- **Watch the seasoning.** Most of the sodium in convenience Mexican food kits is in the seasoning mix. This can be controlled in two ways: simply use less of the seasoning powder; or mix up your own seasoning easily by combining a bit of garlic, onion, chili powder and cumin.
- **Bean it up.** Beans, a staple in Mexican cooking, are a great way to add nutrition to your meal—they're a great source of fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals. A simple, healthy way to incorporate them is to buy canned beans and rinse them to remove sodium, and add the beans to ground meat as it browns for tacos or enchiladas or mix them with a little salsa for a side dish.
- **Make your own salsa.** Instead of buying a premade, high-sodium salsa, consider whipping up your own simple sauce. Whisk together one diced tomato, a small diced onion, a handful of chopped cilantro, a clove of minced garlic, one small finely diced jalapeno pepper, and a splash of lime juice.

—Heidi McIndoo, M.S., R.D.

Mexican Supermarket Foods: A Nutrition Comparison

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

✓ = *EN*'s Picks. Dinner kit picks contain no more than 600 mg sodium (25% DV), 6 g total fat (9% DV), and 1 g saturated fat (5% DV). Rice picks contain no more than 620 mg sodium (26% DV), 6 g fat (9% DV), and 1 g saturated fat (5% DV). Frozen meal picks contain no more than 600 mg sodium (25% DV), 12 g total fat (18% DV), 3 g saturated fat (15% DV), and at least 220 calories (11% DV). Frozen items contain no more than 500 mg sodium (21% DV), 8 g total fat (12% DV), and 1.5 g saturated fat (8% DV).

Supermarket Mexican Foods	Serving Size	Calories	Sodium (mg)	Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Pro (g)
DINNER KITS (WITHOUT MEAT)*								
Casa Fiesta Taco Dinner Kit	3 ea	180	835	6.5	5	27	3	3
✓ Garden of Eatin' Taco Dinner Kit	2 ea	150	600	6	0.5	20	1	2
✓ Mission Taco Kit	2 ea	120	580	5	1	18	2	2
Old El Paso Enchilda Dinner Kit	1½ ea	150	1030	3.5	1	27	2	3
Old El Paso Fajita Kit	2 ea	170	960	4.5	1	30	1	4
Old El Paso Soft Taco Dinner Kit	2 ea	170	960	4.5	1	29	2	4
RICE MIXES (AS PREPARED)								
✓ Knorr Fiesta Sides Mexican Rice**	1 c	280	590	6	1	48	2	6
Knorr Fiesta Sides Spanish Rice**	1 c	280	660	6	1	49	2	6
Old El Paso Fiesta Rice	1 c	240	680	4.5	1	47	1	5
Old El Paso Mexican Rice	1 c	250	930	4.5	1	48	1	5
✓ Uncle Ben's Ready Rice Spanish Style	1 c	200	620	2.5	0	40	2	4
FROZEN MEALS (ENTRÉE WITH SIDE, BASED ON 1 PACKAGE)								
Amy's Bowls Tortilla Casserole & Black Beans	269 g	390	780	18	6	41	10	17
Amy's Chili & Cornbread	298 g	340	680	6	2.5	59	10	11
Amy's Enchilada with Spanish Rice & Beans	284 g	330	740	8	1	53	9	9
✓ Amy's Light & Lean Soft Taco Fiesta	227 g	220	560	4.5	1.5	40	5	7
Amy's Mexican Tamale Pie	227 g	150	590	3	0	27	4	5
Amy's Tamale Roasted Vegetables	292 g	280	740	7	0.5	44	10	9
Evol Bowls Bean & Cheese Enchilada	255 g	420	590	15	6	55	8	18
✓ Kashi Spicy Black Bean Enchilada	255 g	260	600	7	1	45	8	8
✓ Lean Cuisine Chicken Enchilada Suiza	255 g	290	560	5	2	51	3	10
✓ Lean Cuisine Chili Lime Chicken	251 g	240	530	2.5	0.5	38	2	16
✓ Lean Cuisine Sante Fe Style Rice & Beans	294 g	290	590	5	2	50	4	11
Smart Ones Chicken Enchiladas Suiza	255 g	290	640	5	2	49	3	11
Smart Ones Sante Fe Style Rice & Beans	255 g	300	630	7	2.5	49	5	9
Stouffer's Chicken Enchiladas w/ Cheese Sauce & Rice	201 g	280	720	12	7	30	3	12
FROZEN INDIVIDUAL ENTREES/SNACKS								
Lean Cuisine Baja Style Chicken Quesadilla	1 ea (141 g)	270	680	7	3	35	3	18
Smart Ones Chicken Quesadilla	1 ea (113 g)	210	470	6	2.5	28	7	11
Taos Joe's Southwest Chicken Quesadillas	1 ea (170 g)	320	740	16	2	26	1	20
Trader Joe's Chicken Chili Verde Burritos	1 ea (198 g)	360	960	9	1.5	49	3	21
✓ Trader Joe's Mini Beef Tacos	4 ea (79 g)	200	280	8	1	21	2	11
✓ Trader Joe's Mini Chicken Tacos	4 ea (79 g)	190	250	8	0.5	20	2	10
Trader Joe's Mini Chicken Tamalitos	4 ea (141 g)	300	620	17	2	25	3	12
✓ Trader Jose's 99% Fat Free Bean & Rice Burrito	1 ea (169 g)	260	490	1	0	48	7	13
Trader Jose's Beef Steak Burritos	1 ea (227 g)	380	1040	9	1.5	63	6	16
Trader Jose's Beef Tamales	1 ea (140 g)	240	670	13	2	26	4	12
✓ Trader Jose's Beef Taquitos	1 ea (51 g)	100	160	3	1	10	<1	7
Trader Jose's Black Bean & Cheese Taquitos	4 ea (150 g)	310	180	11	2	42	7	12
✓ Trader Jose's Black Bean & Corn Enchilada	1 ea (135 g)	130	230	4	0	20	2	4
Whole Kitchen Cheese Enchiladas	1 ea (227 g)	330	690	10	5	43	5	17
Whole Kitchen Chicken Enchiladas	1 ea (227 g)	310	610	8	3	42	5	16

Note: g=gram, mg=milligram, c=cup, ea=each, sat fat=saturated fat, carb=carbohydrates, DV=Daily Value. Daily requirement based on 2,000 calorie/day diet. Source: company websites and product packages.

*Nutritional information does not include additional meat suggested per package directions. When prepared with one pound of 90% lean ground beef (based on four servings per package), add the following to the nutrients listed above: 177 calories, 10 g total fat, 4 g saturated fat, and 56 mg sodium.

**Nutritional information does not include additional oil suggested per package directions.