

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

HALFWAY HOMEMADE – COOKING WITH CONVENIENCE FOODS

There can be so many barriers to healthy eating: the added time for food preparation and time spent in the kitchen, time to meal plan, knowledge and skills working with whole foods, and the extra cost. It's a lot easier to open a package, add water, and hope for the best. In 1985, 52% of our main meals were prepared via "stovetop" cooking methods. Today, it's only 33%. We've forgotten how to cook! If it can't be made in 30 minutes or less, we feel lost.

Food blogs, Pinterest, and the digital foodie culture has added the pressure to be creative and innovative in the kitchen, which is intimidating and sets unrealistic expectations for what it takes to put a healthy, homemade meal on the table.

It doesn't take a creative genius to make a classic and delicious meal from scratch. It's time to get back in the kitchen! Rather than focus on the barriers to healthy, homemade cooking, why not blend the best of both worlds? Combining healthy, whole food cooking with a few convenience foods to cut down on time and budget can be the recipe for getting back to the homemade flavour we all love.

Why Does Homemade Matter?

Statistics show that countries who spend more time cooking from scratch, have lower rates of obesity. When less time is spent cooking at home, there is an increase in processed snacks and convenience foods. These foods often lack nutrition and can be high in sugar, salt, and trans fats contributing to the epidemic of chronic disease and obesity. But can we combine healthy and convenient and still create a nutritious whole food meal?



Advantages of Convenience Foods

- Reduced preparation time
- Little planning required
- Less spoilage
- Easy clean-up
- Good for inexperienced cooks
- Pleases a variety of tastes
- Usually less expensive

Disadvantages of Convenience Foods

- Reduced protein consumption
- No control over ingredients like sugar, salt, trans fats, additives and preservatives
- Higher in calories
- Cost per serving can be higher
- Lacking in nutrition, fresh fruits and vegetables



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Halfway Homemade Recipe Idea Chicken Enchilada Lasagna



Ingredients:

- ½ lb. precooked lasagna noodles (or use gluten free)
- 2 cups jarred salsa
- 2 ½ cups diced rotisserie chicken
- 2 cups pre-shredded cheese
- ¼ cup fresh chopped cilantro
- 2 green onions, sliced
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt (or sour cream)

Directions:

1. Spread a bit of salsa on the bottom of a baking dish to prevent noodles from sticking. Use a 9×13 pan for one lasagna or divide between smaller dishes for smaller portions.
2. Add a layer of noodles, a layer of salsa, then shredded chicken, then cheese. Repeat until dish is full or you run out of noodles. End with a layer of noodles topped with salsa and a generous handful of shredded cheese.
3. Bake lasagna at 375 degrees F for 15-20 minutes until the cheese is melted and bubbly.
4. Let cooked lasagna cool for 10-15 minutes before slicing. Top with cilantro, green onions, and a dollop of plain Greek yogurt and serve.

Servings: 6

Per Serving: Total Calories: 294 | Fat: 4.2g | Sodium: 732mg | Carb: 34g
Fibre: 3.5g | Protein: 27g

What Can We Work With?

Today, 100% homemade may be unrealistic for the average consumer. Incorporating grocery store convenience-based products into home cooking can be a manageable way to add shortcuts to meal preparation, while still preparing a healthy and tasty halfway homemade dish. Look for items that are preservative free, low in sugar, salt, and trans fat, and contain natural ingredients. Here are a few ideas:

- Store-cooked **rotisserie chicken** for salads, stir-fries, and sandwiches.
- Canned **beans** and **lentils** to increase protein in a simple, quick dish.
- Precooked **whole grain rice**.
- Canned **tomato and tomato sauce**.
- Jarred **salsa, guacamole, hummus, and pesto**.
- Make homemade soups easy with canned or boxed **broth** and **soup**.
- Look for bottled **salad dressing** made with olive or canola oil and limited ingredients.
- Frozen **vegetables** are often more nutritious than fresh produce that has been shipped globally or stored too long in your fridge.
- Pre-cut **fruits** and **vegetables** for easy stir-fries, smoothies, and snacks.
- Bagged **salads** can have more preservatives, but may divert you from a quick, convenient meal option like fast food.
- **Seasonings** made with natural herbs and spices can cut down on time and add a quick kick to what might otherwise seem like a bland meal.

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