

THE ICE HARVEST
Frozen fruits and vegetables retain nutrients.



MEALS PREPARED WITH FROZEN FOODS ARE FAST, TASTY, AND HEALTHIER THAN YOU THINK BY LESLIE GOLDMAN

A Cold Case

IF YOU'RE LIKE MANY HEALTH-CONSCIOUS RUNNERS, YOU USUALLY ZIP RIGHT PAST THE frozen food aisle (unless you're looking for Ben & Jerry's). Such a move made sense back when frozen meals were limited to TV dinners loaded with fat, sodium, and mysterious-sounding ingredients. But times have changed, and today healthy, natural, and organic foods are a growing segment of the \$28 billion frozen-food market.

While there are still plenty of nutritional disasters available, a careful consumer can select such guilt-free frozen options as whole-grain rice, vegetable medleys, precooked lean meats, and even sushi and sweet-potato pancakes—products that make preparing a quick, nutritious meal a matter of simply reaching into a well-stocked freezer.

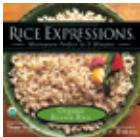
Eating frozen foods, especially fruits and vegetables, makes sense for runners looking for the best nutrient bang for their buck, says Leslie Bonci, R.D., director of sports nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, particularly in winter, when fresh options are limited. "Produce is picked when ripe, then flash frozen, which preserves nutrients," she says. In fact, some frozen fruits and vegetables may be better for you than their fresh counterparts, because in the five to eight days it takes for most produce to go from harvest to your table, nutrient levels begin to drop. "Broccoli and strawberries lose some of their vitamin C and antioxidants," says Bonci. "And leafy greens like spinach can lose most of their nutrients within eight days." A study out of the University of Illinois found that after three days in the store and three days in a refrigerator,

fresh green beans retained 36 percent of their vitamin C, while the frozen version retained 77 percent.

Plus, what made TV dinners popular with 1950s housewives holds true for runners dashing from workouts to the kitchen today: Frozen foods save time. You can skip the week's second trip to the store for fresh foods, and there's no need to wash and chop vegetables, mix marinades, or wait 40 minutes for chicken to broil. "It's minimal effort and maximal benefit," says Bonci.

Heat and Eat

For options at every meal, stock your freezer with a variety of items (such as the ones listed here) that marry flavor and convenience: mixed berries for smoothies; sliced peaches for a morning oatmeal-and-brown-sugar cobbler; a vegetable mix to add to pasta; soy crumbles, which can be tossed into a stovetop marinara sauce or stew for a protein boost; and superfast meals like frozen lasagna.

POSTRUN BREAKFAST	LUNCH	PRERUN SNACK	DINNER
 <p>Morningstar Farms meatless “sausage” patties Pair with a slice of tomato and an English muffin or a bagel for a breakfast “burger.”</p>	 <p>Boca Burger Add protein to a salad of leafy greens, tomato, and cucumber, or serve on a whole-wheat bun with tomato and avocado.</p>	 <p>Kashi Go Lean waffles Spread one waffle with one tablespoon of peanut butter (180 calories), or top with berries and low-fat cottage cheese.</p>	 <p>Tyson Fully Cooked Seasoned Steak Strips Stir-fry steak, green pepper, and onion for a delicious fajita fix. Also try the seasoned</p>
 <p>Dr. Praeger's sweet-potato pancakes Serve with hard-boiled or scrambled eggs for a perfect carb-and-protein recovery meal.</p>	 <p>Rice Expressions brown rice Microwave with canned black beans, diced tomatoes, and frozen corn to boost your carbs for an evening run.</p>	 <p>Banzai Frozen Sushi Defrost four pieces of a California roll (190 calories) or shrimp roll (230 calories) in the microwave for 45 to 90 seconds.</p>	 <p>Contessa Shrimp Mediterranean Serve this tangy vegetable-and-shrimp pasta with Tabatchnick frozen vegetable or split-pea soup.</p>

Cold (Short) Cuts

So what's the secret to healthy frozen meals? The principles are the same as when shopping for other products. “Frozen or not, be mindful of calories, fat, and sodium,” says Molly Kimball, R.D., of the Center of Ochsner Health System in New Orleans. Look for frozen entrées with less than 10 grams of fat per serving and 1,000 milligrams or less of sodium. Check the ingredients list, too. “If you're buying frozen waffles, make sure whole wheat is the first ingredient, and choose frozen fruit with no added sugar,” says Kimball. (For a day's worth of options, see “Heat and Eat,” above.)

And don't be fooled by frozen varieties

of traditionally fried food. “A lot of people mistakenly think because they're taking fries out of the freezer and putting them in the oven that they're having oven-baked fries,” Kimball says. “But they were fried and then frozen.” The same goes for breaded shrimp and chicken nuggets. Kimball also shuns frozen hamburgers. “They can be so high in fat—up to 28 grams per patty.”

But do consider foods you might not normally choose. Kimball is a fan of frozen protein-dense edamame. These nutty-tasting soybeans offer a nice mix of carbs and protein, making them “a good afternoon snack if you're running in the evening.” Look for resealable bags that

let you grab a handful at a time and defrost in the microwave. Kimball also likes frozen fish that comes vacuum-sealed so you can cook one fillet at a time.

To keep foods well frozen, and therefore well preserved, set your freezer's temperature at 0°F and avoid overloading it. Keep foods toward the rear of the freezer because every time the door opens, warm air causes tiny bits to defrost; for this same reason, avoid storing foods on the door. And place foods you want to freeze near the bottom, where temperatures are coldest.

When selecting produce, steer clear of bags with big ice clumps; they're a hint that the contents may have thawed and refrozen. After you open them, Bonci recommends double bagging to prevent freezer burn, which is a form of dehydration and alters texture and taste. Put the original bag in a resealable freezer bag and squeeze out extra air before sealing. And use all items in your freezer within six months to ensure the best taste. Of course, if that bag of frozen peas ends up sitting around for over a year, don't toss it: You can always use it as an icepack. **RW**

Training Table

WHAT THE ELITE EAT

“My Brigham Young University team ate steaks the night before meets. We'd go to Outback. I take my steak medium rare. Red meat gives you protein and iron, but the biggest benefit is likely the placebo effect; if you think it works for you, it does.”

—JASON McADAMS, 2006 NCAA Steeplechase Champion

