



Quick, Easy Meals—Un-Junked

Not all convenience foods are created equal.

Instant ramen, boxed meals, and many canned soups are ultra-processed, packed with sodium, and often full of artificial flavors and additives. These may be cheap and quick, but eating them regularly can add up to long-term health issues. Diets high in ultra-processed foods are linked to a greater risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and more.

But quick doesn't have to mean unhealthy. There are plenty of shelf-stable, freezer-friendly, and ready-in-minutes options that make mealtime easier without the junk.

What to Watch Out For

When scanning the shelves, try to avoid:

- Long ingredient lists with hard-to-pronounce additives
- High sodium (more than 600mg per serving)
- Refined grains with little or no fiber
- Added sugars or saturated fat

Smarter Convenience Picks

These days, it's easier than ever to find healthier canned & boxed options. Here are a few examples:

- Vegetable and bean-based soups (Amy's Organic Lentil, Pacific's Black Bean & Kale, Goya's Cuban Black Bean)
- Brown rice pilaf or quinoa mixes (Near East Brown Rice Pilaf, Seeds of Change Whole Grain blends)
- Whole grain pasta or noodle cups with cleaner ingredients and less sodium (Lotus Foods Rice Ramen, Dr. McDougall's Right Foods)
- Tabouli mix made with bulgur—just add water, lemon, and chopped veggies
- Frozen grain or veggie blends (Trader Joe's Riced Cauliflower Stir Fry, 365 Organic Brown Rice & Quinoa)

Unexpected Helpers to Save Time and Boost Nutrition

Sometimes the best time-savers aren't where you'd expect. These ready-to-use staples can seriously cut down cooking time while still keeping things healthy:

- **Cooked lentils in vacuum-sealed packs** – Use cold in salads or warm in soups, wraps, or curries
- **Shelf-stable tofu** – Chop and pan-fry for bowls, stir into miso soup, or crumble into sauces
- **Microwavable farro, barley, or quinoa** – Use as a base for grain bowls or toss into salads
- **Dry soup mixes with real ingredients** (beans, grains, herbs) – Look for Frontier Soups or similar brands
- **No-salt-added canned pumpkin or butternut squash** – Stir into pasta, risotto, or lentil stews
- **Vacuum-packed beets** – Slice into grain bowls or mix with lemon juice and herbs as a side
- **Frozen mashed sweet potato or squash** – Use as a creamy base for soups or mix into oatmeal
- **Low-sodium marinara or Indian simmer sauces** – Fast flavor base for chickpeas, lentils, or tofu
- **Frozen herb cubes** (like garlic, basil, or ginger) – Instant flavor, no chopping needed
- **Pre-cooked whole grains from the fridge or freezer** – Batch cook and freeze for your own grab-and-go pouches

Moroccan-Spiced Cracked Wheat with Chickpeas & Greens



Inspired by Mediterranean flavors and built with pantry staples.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cracked wheat (bulgur)
- 2 cups water or low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp Moroccan spice blend, store bought or homemade (see DIY blend below)
- 1 can (1.5 cups) chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup frozen spinach or chopped kale
- 1-2 lemon wedges

Optional: Make Your Own Moroccan Spice Blend

This blend adds warm, earthy flavor to grains, beans, or roasted vegetables.

- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ¼ tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- Pinch of cayenne (optional)

Mix and store in a small jar.

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, heat olive oil and add cracked wheat.
2. Toast lightly for 2 minutes.
3. Stir in water or broth, spice blend, and chickpeas.
4. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 12–15 minutes or until tender.
5. Stir in spinach during the last 3 minutes.
6. Fluff and serve warm with a squeeze of lemon.

Gluten-Free Swap:

Use **millet** or **short-grain brown rice** in place of bulgur.

For millet: rinse and cook 1 cup millet with 2½ cups water or broth for 20–25 minutes.

For brown rice: cook 1 cup rice with 2 cups water or broth for 35–40 minutes, or use a quick-cook or frozen version for faster prep.