



**D**O you make yourself sick by frequently snacking on convenience foods? Are you a young mom whose children prefer pizza to 'parathas' or noodles to 'nachani' broth? Either way, it's high time you realised that fast foods are not so hot for your health.

# KICK THE CONVENIENCE FOOD HABIT

Don't let convenience outweigh correctness in food selection, says Veena Patwardhan



Agreed, it is far more convenient to opt for ready-to-eat food while grappling with increasingly busy lifestyles. But, remember, eating well certainly does not necessarily mean eating right.

## The Fast Track To Poor Health

Sure, convenience foods reduce your time in the kitchen. Fast to cook, but are they good to eat?

Binging on convenience foods regularly <sup>can</sup> have a detrimental effect.

- These foods contain too much fat, salt and sugar and could eventually lead to obesity, high blood pressure and heart disease.
- These foods lack dietary fibre and thus, offer no protection against several types of cancers.
- Moreover, essential nutrients are destroyed in highly processed foods.
- The enrichment by way of synthetic vitamins and minerals added later on does not benefit the body in the same way as the nutrients present in natural foods.
- Most fast foods are laced with chemicals in the form of preservatives, artificial flavours and colours. Besides, they also have an addictive taste.

## Food For Thought

- Processed foods like sweetened cereals or cornflakes may be convenient to serve, but they certainly don't come cheap.
- Food preferences and eating habits are established in childhood. Hence, if you're a young mother or will be raising a family soon, remember that selecting the right foods is most important during your children's formative years.

## Smart Substitutes

What's most appealing about convenience foods is that they hardly require any prior preparation. But why jeopardise your health for the sake of convenience? Think smart. With a little advance planning and clever time management, you can make sure you have nutritious snacks ready whenever you or your family are hungry.

- Always stock up on seasonal fruits. Prepare fruit salads or just toss plain banana slices in yoghurt. Add a dash of salt and pepper or sugar. If you prefer custard as a

topping, prepare and store sufficient custard for a few days in the fridge.

- My personal time saver in the kitchen is to cook a dish once, but prepare sufficient to be served at least twice in the week. 'Phirni', 'rava kheer', 'nachani' broth ('nachani' flour cooked in water or milk sweetened with either jaggery or sugar), 'upma', or even simple 'batata kanda pohe' - all require very little cooking time. The leftovers can be refrigerated, heated and relished again a couple of days later.

- Parathas with a sweet or savoury filling can be prepared for up to a whole week and frozen. Try different fillings each week, like crumbled paneer or grated cheese mixed with chopped onions, chillies and coriander, or mincemeat, or dry subji like potato bhaji, or scraped coconut mixed with jaggery.
- Go easy on the butter or ghee while frying the parathas. If you're a stay-at-home mom, thaw a few before your kids get home from school. Each day, just reheat a few and you're ready to go.
- In case you live to eat noodles and can't do without them, throw in a handful of cooked sprouts, chana, rajma or corn to increase the fibre and nutritional content.
- Make sandwiches with brown bread for a change.
- Roll up a chapati with sandwich filling inside.
- Have fresh lime juice. It costs less and is more nutritious. Keep powdered sugar handy at home and you'll be able to prepare lime juice in a jiffy.

## Hot Tips

- To make sure you stay healthy, make eating wholesome foods a part of your lifestyle.
- Don't snack on convenience foods at home. Have fast foods only once in a while, when you're on the move. That should satisfy your occasional cravings for these foods.
- Avoid purchasing highly processed foods. Select those that are as close to their natural state as possible.
- Make it a habit to check the labels on convenience foods.
- Watch out for the various ploys used by companies to push their products down the throats of consumers.