

# Weight can melt off when eating low-calorie frozen meals, fruits and vegetables, research finds

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Improving health can be as easy as opening the freezer door. "Save time, save money, boost nutrition and control portions by eating low-calorie, frozen foods," advises Jessica Bartfield, MD, internal medicine.

"The taste, nutrition, overall quality and variety of frozen food has improved tremendously. I often recommend to my patients looking to [lose weight](#) that they fulfill at least one of the three basic meals with a frozen entrée as a proven dieting strategy," said Bartfield, who specializes in nutrition and weight management at Loyola University Health System.

Many studies, including a recent one published last year in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), support the use of meal replacements, which provide convenient calorie control. "More patients who incorporated [meal replacements](#) into their weight-loss plan achieved a clinically significant 5 percent weight loss, according to several major studies," Bartfield said.

To safely lose weight, Bartfield recommends that most people will need to consume a low-calorie diet, anywhere from 1,000 to 1,800 [calories per day](#), depending on certain factors such as weight, age, height and gender. Most frozen meals provide 200 to 350 calories per meal, which fits within that range along with one to two healthy snacks per day. People with higher calorie needs can add fruits or vegetables to the meal

or even a small serving of protein to hit the calorie target," she said. "Low-calorie frozen meals provide convenience, structure and calorie control, which leads to better adherence and weight loss."

Bartfield offers five reasons why going frozen can help you lose weight and improve [nutritional content](#) of what you eat:

1. Enforced [Portion Control](#) - "One box is usually one serving, so it's easy to understand exactly how much you're eating," Bartfield said. "You don't have to measure, count or weigh the food to calculate the calories."

2. Always Available - "If you are hungry, particularly during or after a long work day, it's easy to seek out food that is tasty, fast and easy to prepare, which is why many turn to high-fat, high-calorie fast food. Frozen low-calorie items provide a healthier choice with the same convenience."

3. No Waste - "Unlike fresh meats and produce, frozen foods have a very long shelf life and rarely are tossed out because they go bad," Bartfield said. "Plus there is always a product line of frozen meals on sale at the store. There is little difference in brands, so I tell patients to buy what's on sale. You are saving money, saving time and it's stress-free."

4. Transparent Nutrition - "Read the label and note the calories and the sodium," she said. "I tell patients wanting to lose weight to look for items under 600 milligrams of sodium. If you are watching the salt due to high blood pressure or diabetes, stick to under 400 milligrams. Focus on the calories and choose something under 350 calories or that fits within your total targeted caloric consumption for the day."

5. Variety - "Chinese, Mexican, Italian, Thai, vegetarian, all the popular ethnic styles and meat or meatless ingredients are offered to satisfy your

taste buds, as well as fulfilling breakfast, lunch and dinner entrees," she said. "Low-calorie snacks and even individual desserts are also offered in the frozen aisle. Make sure you round out your healthy frozen meal with frozen or fresh fruit and veggie side dishes. They are naturally low in calories, high in vitamins and minerals, and great sources of fiber, which help you to feel full."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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