

The
BEST
FOODS
**A Woman
Can Buy**

We gathered some of the biggest names in food and nutrition for our annual roundup of the **healthiest, tastiest, and most affordable products on the market**

■ by KAREN CICERO ■ photograph by CHARLES MASTERS



Packaged foods get a bad rap—

but they shouldn't. Eating whole, unprocessed food is smart health advice that we're squarely behind, but cooking from scratch can be unrealistic. Imagine a weeknight meal without at least one packaged item (think frozen veggies and a box of pasta).

To strike a balance, we asked five leading nutritional experts for their favorite healthy packaged foods—that means no trans fats, refined grains, high sodium levels, or hidden sugar (or unpronounceable ingredients), and plenty of antioxidants, minerals, whole grains, and good-for-you monounsaturated fats. Our experts gave the thumbs-up to nearly 100 products, and the boot to more than 300. In a 4-hour taste test, *Prevention* staffers narrowed it down to 25 favorites (including some great budget buys).

FROZEN VEGGIES

1 Alexia Select Sides Roasted Red Potatoes & Baby Portabella Mushrooms

Toss these vitamin-packed spuds, 'shrooms, and green beans into a skillet, stir in the packet of thyme-infused canola and olive oil blend, and sauté for 10 minutes. "I love these nicely seasoned veggies," raves judge Brian Wansink, PhD.

Per 1¼ cups: 140 cal, 7 g fat, 180 mg sodium



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Forberg, RD, who likes this unsweetened brand. Plus, Dole's berries are frozen shortly after they are picked so they don't lose vitamin C (1 cup has 90% of what you need for the day). And they're loaded with anthocyanins, antioxidants that may help lower cholesterol and reduce your risk of cancer.

Per cup: 50 cal, 0 g fat, 0 mg sodium

SWEET POTATO

3 Mann's Sweet Potato Spears

Hate peeling potatoes? Go for this bag of ready-to-cook fry-shaped sweet tubers. Season with 2 tablespoons olive oil and a little sea salt, and bake for 25 minutes. "These fries feel

FRUIT

2 Dole Sliced Strawberries

When berries aren't in season, it's great to have a frozen option handy, says judge Cheryl

Meet Our GRADE-A EXPERTS

SUGAR SLEUTH Nutritionist for NBC's *The Biggest Loser* and coauthor of *The Biggest Loser: 6 Weeks to a Healthier You*, **Cheryl Forberg, RD**, vetoed more foods than any judge.

NUTRIENT GURU Director of the Yale Prevention Research Center and codeveloper of the NuVal Nutritional Scoring System **David L. Katz, MD, MPH**, ensured the picks weren't empty calories.

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like a total splurge, but they're nutrient packed," says Forberg. "One serving provides the cancer-fighting vitamin A you need for the day." **Per cup (uncooked):** 70 cal, 0 g fat, 45 mg sodium

JUICE

**4 Tropicana
Trop50 Pome-
granate Blueberry**

This fruit juice/water blend is sweetened with stevia, a compound that comes from a shrub native to South America, for half the calories of a typical glass. "Stevia is natural and seems to be free of problems associated with artificial sweeteners," says judge David Katz, MD. **Per cup:** 50 cal, 0 g fat, 10 mg sodium



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NOODLE

**5 Bionaturae 100%
Organic Whole
Wheat Lasagne**

Made from whole durum wheat grown on family farms in Italy, these noodles have 6 g of fiber and 7 g of protein per serving. "Plus, the texture and flavor are wonderful," gushes Forberg.

Per 3 noodles: 180 cal, 1.5 g fat, 0 mg sodium



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OATMEAL

**6 Country Choice
Organic Quick
Cook Steel Cut Oats**

If you prefer the texture (and health benefits) of steel-cut oats to instant oats but don't have time to make them every morning, you'll love this product. This company cracks the whole oat before it's chopped so it cooks in just 5 to 7 minutes. Everything is the same nutritionally—the filling fiber, whole grain, and heart-healthy antioxidants. And does the taste pass muster? Forberg, a longtime steel-cut oatmeal fan, gives it "a big thumbs-up." **Per cup (prepared with water):** 150 cal, 3 g fat, 0 mg sodium

FROZEN ENTRÉE

**7 Healthy Choice
All Natural Roasted
Red Pepper Marinara**

★ **BUDGET BUY**

Our experts thought this affordable entrée was better nutritionally than many of the pricier organic brands. Tasty whole grain pasta is tossed with roasted red pepper sauce and topped with grated cheese. The result: 5 g of fiber and

TASTER-IN-CHIEF Author of the much-beloved *Moosewood Cookbook*, **Mollie Katzen** gave us her gourmet opinion. Her latest book, *Get Cooking*, is especially for culinary novices.

REALITY CHECKER Director of Cornell University Food and Brand Lab and author of *Mindless Eating*, **Brian Wansink, PhD**, is a regular at McDonald's and Sam's Club. He kept us all grounded.

CALORIE COUNTER Foods with sneaky hidden calories had no chance with **Elisa Zied, RD**, spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association and author of *Nutrition at Your Fingertips*.

15% of your daily calcium need, plus at least 10% of nine other vitamins and minerals per serving. “It’s a little low in calories and high in sodium,” says judge Elisa Zied, RD. “So pair it with a medium apple or banana, for another 100 or so calories to keep you satisfied and extra potassium to help balance the sodium in the dish.” **Per meal:** 270 cal, 6 g fat, 580 mg sodium

RICE

8 Uncle Ben’s Whole Grain White Rice

If you don’t like the chewy texture of brown rice but know it’s good for you (it has 3 g of fiber per cup and trace minerals like zinc and copper), you’ll flip for this lighter whole grain variety. “The stealth approach is wonderful,” says Wansink. “It looks like white but has the nutrition of brown.” **Per cup (cooked):** 170 cal, 1 g fat, 5 mg sodium

CHINESE

9 Annie Chun’s Mini Wontons

For a quick, fun meal, boil these wontons—either the Pork & Ginger or the Chicken & Cilantro—in low-sodium broth. “Most wonton soups have more than 900 mg of sodium,” says Zied. “With these, you could make your own for under 300 mg.” In addition, the company uses antibiotic-free chicken. **Per 4 pieces (Chicken & Cilantro):** 50 cal, 0.5 g fat, 160 mg sodium



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YOGURT

10 Chobani Greek Yogurt

All Greek yogurts are thicker, creamier, and have more filling protein in 6 ounces than their American counterparts. But Chobani’s nonfat flavors—including the new raspberry—taste “particularly luscious,” says Forberg. “It’s like eating dessert. Even the plain is amazing.” Another bonus: The company’s packaging is widely recyclable, 10% of its profits go to charity, and it buys hormone-free milk from a local dairy. **Per 6-ounce carton (raspberry):** 140 cal, 0 g fat, 65 mg sodium

EGGS

11 Eggland’s Best Eggs

Already lower in cholesterol and fat than other brands, Eggland’s Best eggs now have 4 times more vitamin D (which helps your body absorb calcium) and 3 times more omega-3 fatty acids (which lower the risk of sudden heart attacks and may improve your memory). That’s because the company removed animal products and added vitamins and minerals to the chicken feed. “It’s smart to use these eggs to help prevent heart trouble,” says Katz. You can buy them in assorted sizes and organically raised. **Per large egg:** 70 cal, 4 g fat, 60 mg sodium



SOUP

12 Campbell's Select Harvest Light Savory Chicken with Vegetables Soup

The broth is packed with veggies, which supply a bounty of antioxidants and 60% of the vitamin A you need daily. "The colorful veggies make this more special than typical canned soup," says Zied. Chicken breast pieces pump up the protein (5 g per serving), while sea salt adds more flavor than regular salt, so the company didn't use as much. **Per cup:** 80 cal, 1 g fat, 480 mg sodium



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on the shelf. "If you eat deli meat a few times a week, it's especially important to choose a low-sodium version," says Zied. Another plus: It leaves out the nitrates or preservatives (some research has linked nitrates to colon cancer) without charging you a premium.

Per 3-slice serving: 50 cal, 1 g fat, 450 mg sodium

TOFU

15 Nasoya Organic Tofu Plus

★BUDGET BUY

All tofu contains heart-healthy isoflavones, but this brand is fortified with B vitamins and vitamin D, plus 20% of your daily calcium need—and doesn't cost more than regular tofu. "Women's calcium requirements go up by 200 mg when they hit 51, so switching to this tofu can help make up the difference," says Zied. "Extra vitamin B12 is also helpful because you don't absorb as much after age 50."

Per 3-ounce serving: 70 cal, 3 g fat, 0 mg sodium



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CRACKERS

13 Triscuit Thin Crisps

★BUDGET BUY

Made only with fiber-rich whole wheat, soybean and/or palm oil, and salt, these triangle-shaped crackers are more airy than regular Triscuits and many of the more expensive health-food-store brands. "You get about twice as many crackers for the same number of calories," says Zied. **Per 15 pieces:** 130 cal, 5 g fat, 180 mg sodium



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BURGER

16 SeaPak Salmon Burgers

These patties are rich in omega-3s, fats that protect the heart and may help battle depression and—early research suggests—may help you lose weight. "These are great for people who don't like the strong flavor or texture of a



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DELI MEAT

14 Hormel Natural Choice Mesquite Deli Turkey

★BUDGET BUY

This brand has about one-third less sodium than many others

salmon fillet,” says Katz, who enjoyed the smoky taste and meat loaf consistency. And the salmon is wild and sustainably caught. **Per burger:** 110 cal, 3 g fat, 380 mg sodium

APPLESAUCE

17 Santa Cruz Organic Apple Peach Sauce

Adding peaches to applesauce delivers vitamins A and E and different kinds of anthocyanins, cancer-fighting antioxidants. “It’s an easy way to add more variety to your diet because nutrients work in synergy,” says Zied. You can find it in jars or preportioned cups. **Per ½ cup:** 80 cal, 0 fat, 10 mg sodium

CHEESE

18 Laughing Cow Mini Babybel Light

Packed with 200 mg of calcium apiece, these mini rounds are made with part-skim milk, which saves 2.5 g of artery-clogging saturated fat. Wansink likes that they’re double-wrapped. “It takes a minute to open, so you’re not eating it mindlessly and you may eat less,” he says. **Per piece:** 50 cal, 3 g fat, 160 mg sodium

FROZEN YOGURT

19 Blue Bunny Double Raspberry All Natural Frozen Yogurt

★ **BUDGET BUY**

This yogurt tastes like raspberry soft-serve ice cream



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with about 20 fewer calories, one-third of the fat, and more calcium. “Be sure to stick to a half-cup portion,” reminds Zied. “A half-gallon of this is roughly the same price as a pint of premium ice cream, but with the bigger package, it’s easy to get carried away.” **Per ½ cup:** 110 cal, 2 g fat, 50 mg sodium

SORBET

20 Häagen-Dazs Mango All Natural Sorbet Cups

Single-serve containers are the solution to “just one more bite” syndrome. The satisfying portion (a tad more than ½ cup) comes with a little spoon tucked under the lid. “It has a good, real mango flavor,” says judge Mollie Katzen. Thanks to that mango, one serving supplies 15% of the vitamin A and 10% of the vitamin C you need daily. **Per container:** 140 cal, 0 g fat, 0 mg sodium

CHOCOLATE TOPPING

21 Justin’s All-Natural Chocolate Hazelnut Butter

This spread made from organic cocoa (which has more heart-healthy flavonoids than tea or wine) and dry-roasted hazelnuts (packed with vitamin E and high in good-for-you mono-unsaturated fats) will totally satisfy. “It has a slightly salty nut flavor with just a hint of sweetness from the chocolate,”

says Katzen, who tried it as a dip with fruit and on a sliver of sourdough bread. It also comes in preportioned 80-calorie packets. **Per 2 tablespoons:** 190 cal, 16 g fat, 75 mg sodium

PESTO SAUCE

22 Le Grand Garden Pesto Sauce

Made with two herbs—basil (its oils may contain anti-inflammatory compounds) and parsley (packed with vitamin K for strong bones)—this sauce has plenty of monounsaturated fats from canola oil. It also has a better herb-to-oil ratio than most other pestos, sparing you about 40 calories for every 2 tablespoons. “It tastes like it was made from the herbs in your backyard,” says Katzen, who fell head over heels for it.

Per 2 tablespoons: 110 cal, 12 g fat, 210 mg sodium

TOMATO BASIL SAUCE

23 Monte Bene Farm Fresh Tomato Basil Pasta Sauce

★BUDGET BUY

A lower-priced version of the company’s gourmet brand, this sauce relies on tasty, locally grown tomatoes for sweetness rather than sugar or, even worse, high-fructose corn syrup. “It’s hard to find a mainstream brand that hasn’t been sweetened,” says Zied, who made delicious spaghetti and meatballs with this sauce.



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Another thing Zied liked: It has about one-half to one-third of the sodium in other brands.

Per ½ cup: 24 cal, 1 g fat, 191 mg sodium

SEASONING

24 Mrs. Dash Fiesta Lime Seasoning Blend

★BUDGET BUY

A dozen spices like cumin, coriander, oregano, and rosemary go into this mix. “Spices contain different antioxidants—some benefit the heart, some are cancer fighting, others are linked to preventing diabetes—so a blend is a super way to get the variety,” says Zied. Salt free, this blend is a lot less expensive (and healthier) than gourmet. **Per ¼ teaspoon:** 0 cal, 0 g fat, 0 mg sodium

GRILL SAUCE

25 Spectrum Organic Malay Asam Grill and Finishing Sauce

Try this citrusy marinade (a blend of pineapple juice, soy oil, soy sauce, and anti-inflammatory spices like turmeric and ginger) to add zing to grilled meat or fish or a chicken stir-fry. “It’s also a great alternative to high-sodium soy sauce for dipping,” says Katz. **Per 2 tablespoons:** 50 cal, 4 g fat, 160 mg sodium

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