

Nutritious meal in a pouch assures busy moms that kids eat right

BY DEBORAH HARTZ
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A working mother, Mary Anne Jackson was often worried about providing the tasty, healthful and nutritious meals for her daughter, Katie, particularly whenever someone else would care for her child.

"I'd try to have dishes ready for her before I left for work and give the baby sitter a list of what should be served with them," she explained.

Neighbors in a similar bind began asking how she coped and were impressed with her prepared-meals approach.

With that in mind, Jackson started My Own Meals, a Deerfield company that produces nutritionally balanced meals for children 2 to 8 years old.

She developed the meals by doing market research, which involved sending 2,000 questionnaires to mothers through a diaper delivery

service. She got lots of input.

"The women seemed to like the idea of prepared meals for their children, but they wanted to be sure we did it right," she said. Suggestions included having vegetables in the meals, using no MSG, spicing the foods to appeal to children and testing them on the young.

After doing lots of book research and thinking about what her daughter liked to eat, Jackson developed 24 entree ideas. These were tasted and retasted by children to see what they liked and disliked about them.

For example, My Favorite Pasta originally resembled pasta fagioli, a traditional Italian dish that contains pinto beans and chunks of tomato. But when children objected to these two ingredients, Jackson substituted lentils and turned the tomatoes into sauce.

Besides the pasta dish, the My Own Meals line includes Chicken Please, My Kind of Chicken, My

Meatballs & Shells and My Turkey Meatballs.

The dinners are packed in shelf-stable pouches.

"One advantage is that the shelf-stable packages can be tossed into a purse or suitcase to take to day care or grandma's," said Jackson. They are light and don't require refrigeration.

The food is heated by boiling or microwaving it right in the pouch, making these dinners quick to prepare and easy to clean up at meal's end.

The dinners are designed to be bought and prepared by adults yet taste good to children. But because of the way they are processed, the dinners do have a taste similar to canned foods.

The package design was carefully developed to appeal to parents. There's even a picture of Jackson and her daughter on the back with a

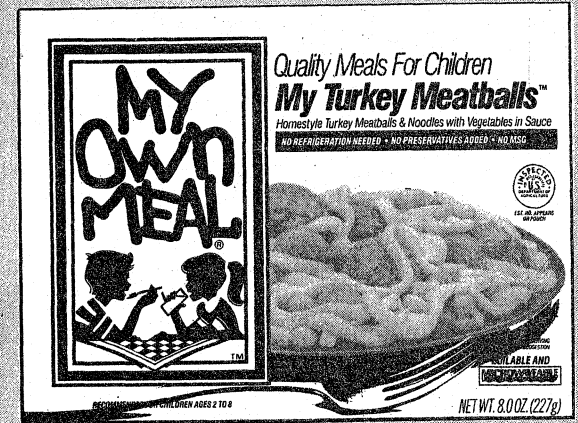
signed endorsement from her.

"I wanted parents to know I am a busy mother myself and stand behind the product," she said.

The My Own Meal's logo of two children primly eating is designed to make Mom think, "This is just how I'd like my kids to eat," said Jackson.

The package has instructions in English as well as Spanish. "Lots of people who care for children are foreign and this should help them use these meals," she said.

My Own Meals are being test marketed at a few local Jewel Food Stores and Dominick's Finer Foods stores. You'll find them in the aisle with the pastas and sauces. They also are available mail order. For a brochure or to place an order, write My Own Meals, P.O. Box 334, Deerfield, Ill. 60015. The meals, which cost \$2.39 to \$2.99, will be shipped to your home.



Shelf-stable entrees that meet children's nutritional needs make feeding them easy when you're on the go.