

Sold As Is

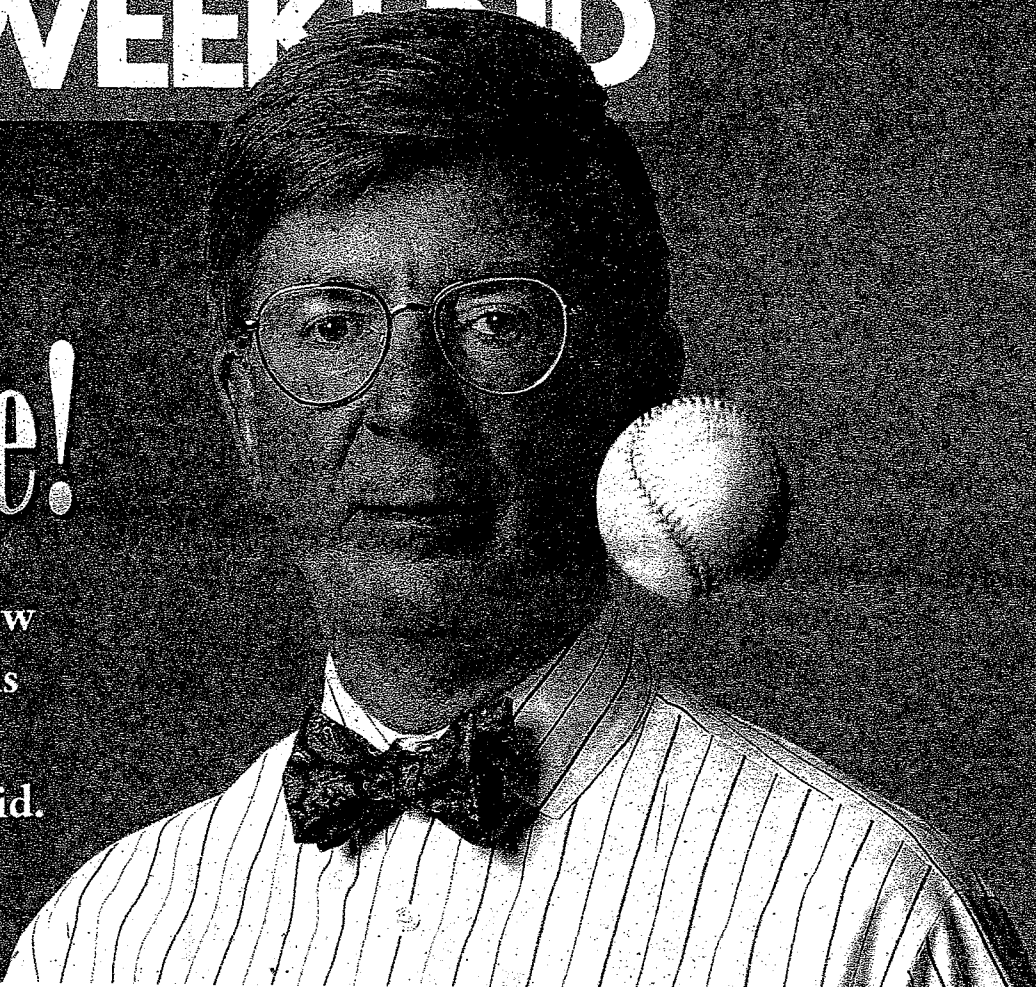
# The Detroit News AND Free Press

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## USA WEEKEND

### Baseball, by George!

Columnist George Will's new book, a tribute to baseball, is a hit. Inside, he recalls his glory days as a stat-happy kid.



## food

# Target: Kids' taste buds

## The lowdown on new microwaveable meals

**T**he kids' food market has spawned cereals and snacks just for the preteen set. Now manufacturers are serving up microwaveable meals — childhood favorites such as macaroni and cheese, burgers, fish and chicken nuggets, pizza and pasta — for kids in a hurry.

The new ready-to-zap dinners and entrees could generate \$250 million to \$300 million in business from the nation's estimated 30 million children, 6 to 14 years old.

The microwave makes these meals quick and convenient, but how do they stack up nutritionally? We asked Yvonne Bronner, a nutritionist with Howard University in Washington, D.C., and a member of the American Dietetic Association, to examine some of them.

Her big reservation: Many of the meals are high in sodium — a common

complaint about "adult" frozen dinners, too. Some kids' meals provide 200 to 400 calories but have 600 to 800 milligrams of sodium — that's 10 percent of the calories but two-thirds of the sodium a child should eat daily. "These products should only be *part* of the total meal plan in a child's day. Parents shouldn't rely on them completely," says Bronner.

With sales of all microwaveable food topping \$2 billion last year, the kids' segment appears ripe:

- About 75 percent of homes now have microwave ovens.
- Traditional kid-pleasers — popcorn, pizza, little burgers — lead microwave sales, meaning many parents already shop with their kids in mind.
- 81 percent of kids ages 6 to 14 use a microwave, according to a national survey by Children's Market Research.



Zap it: Tester Kelly Cassady, 10, checks out a Kid Cuisine meal.

Many of the dinners aimed at kids look suspiciously like kids' meals from fast-food chains, right down to the giveaway toys and puzzles inside. There are both frozen and "shelf-stable" lines.

"The strategy is obvious," says Martin Friedman, editor of *Gorman's New Product News*. "Parents think it's safer for kids to use microwaves than regular ovens."

Here's a look at the new lines, with Bronner's nutritional notes on each:

### LOONEY TUNES MEALS

Tyson's line of eight complete frozen meals (\$2.49 each) hits supermarkets nationwide this month. Includes barbecued chicken with mashed potatoes and corn nuggets; spaghetti and meatballs with corn kernels and oatmeal cookies. The dinners are touted as 90 percent (or better) fat-free and low in sodium. The packages are adorned with familiar Warner Bros. characters — Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Yosemite Sam.

**Nutritional lowdown:** Low in fat, but still high in sodium. (At presstime, a company spokesman said they would be reformulating their sodium goals.) Tyson is the only company that clearly states nutritional breakdowns on its packages.

### MY OWN MEALS (MOM)

Five shelf-stable entrees (\$1.99-2.69) for 2- to 8-year-olds. Additive- and preservative-free. Includes pasta with beef, pork, barley and lentils; chicken with vegetables and brown rice. Available in many Midwestern supermarkets, Toys 'R Us in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut and by mail order (My Own Meals Inc., P.O. Box 334, Deerfield, Ill. 60015).

**Nutritional lowdown:** Good on the fiber and protein fronts and low in fat. But the meals contain too much sodium.