

Meals Hot Off the Shelf

It all started in 1985, when The Dial Corporation's *Lunch Buckets* landed in convenience stores. Dial put soups, stews and pastas—normally found in cans or in the freezer case—in microwave-safe containers that could be heated in less time than conventional canned foods, retain more flavor and nutrients, and still be sterilized to kill all harmful bacteria. (Freezing does not kill bacteria, but rather retards their growth.) Now shelf-stable, microwavable foods are a \$400 million business.

What's made them so popular? • They keep on the shelf for up to two years. • You can take them to work, school and even camp—they're safe to eat without heating, too. • The variety of choices now includes lighter and healthier versions of old favorites, new vegetable combinations and meals for kids.

(Children should never use a microwave oven without adult supervision.)

Here are some of the offerings from major food processors, ranging in price from 79¢ to \$2.89 each. All are single servings unless noted.

ENTREES, SIDE DISHES, SOUPS

New Big Buckets: Dial (10.75 oz). Five items—including Hearty Beef

Stew, Lasagna in Meat Sauce and Pasta 'n Chicken—go from shelf to table in 1½ to 2 minutes.

Micro Cup: Hormel (7.5 oz). Soups and entrees include Chicken Noodle Hearty Soup (150 calories) and Dinty Moore Beef Stew (250 calories).

Top Shelf: Hormel (10 oz). Main dishes that heat in two minutes: Glazed Breast of Chicken with Vegetables and Potatoes (190 calories); Italian-Style Lasagna (360 calories).

Main Meals: Chef Boyardee (10.5 oz). Included: Spaghetti and Meat Balls, Beef Ravioli

Libby's Diner: Nestlé (7¾ oz). A seven-item line including Chili, Beef Stew, Pasta Spirals and Chicken.

LIGHTER FARE

Original Lunch Buckets: Dial (8.5 oz). A line of six soups, five entrees and nine pastas, including New Macaroni 'n Cheese (6 g fat) and Dumpings 'n Chicken (3 g fat), under 300 calories each.

New Light Balance: Dial (8.25 oz).

Meals have lower fat and cholesterol, are sodium-controlled and under 220 calories each. Some choices: Beef Americana, Chicken Cacciatore, Chicken Fiesta, Mushroom Stroganoff.

Healthy Choice: ConAgra (7.5 oz). Eight different meals that vary from 110 to 220 calories each, with about 22 percent calories from fat and 390 to 560 mg sodium. Included: Beef Stew, Lasagna with Meat Sauce, Spicy Turkey Chili with Beans.

FOR KIDS

My Own Meals (8 to 8.5 oz). A line of dinners for children, with no preservatives, additives, artificial ingredients or MSG. Included: Chicken Please, with potatoes, corn, carrots; My Kind of Chicken, with brown rice, carrots, peas; My Turkey Meatballs, with noodles, peas, carrots. Available in grocery stores or by mail from: My Own Meals, Inc., P.O. Box 334, Deerfield, IL 60015. *Table Time*, Beech Nut (6 oz), and *Graduates*, Gerber (6 oz): Meals geared to toddlers.

The best news in "fast food": meals you can take off the shelf, pop in the microwave oven and serve—within minutes.



Suprema.

Vegetable Classics: Del Monte (9.5 to 10 oz, for two to three servings). Nine combinations of vegetables in reusable trays. Fat is low except in three potato products. Included: Vegetables Dijon, Santa Fe Style Corn, Potatoes Au Gratin.

Campbell Soups (7¾ oz). Several popular soups in cups, microwavable in 90 seconds.

Jean Hewitt is FC's food editor.

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