

**The Post Rock Connection**  
**Post Rock Extension District #1 Family and Consumer Sciences Column**  
**Month of July 2023**  
**By Jamie Rathbun, Family and Community Wellness Agent**

**A Better “Boxed Meal”**

Summer is here, and if your life is anything like my family’s, you are going 100 different directions each day – baseball games, vacation bible school, summer weights, raking alfalfa hay, dance lessons, story hour, summer theatre, day camps – you name it, my kids (and so also me) are involved in it.

Add to this the regular demands of daily life, and it’s easy to see why most adults living in the U.S. do not decide what to eat that night until 4 p.m. or later. For a quick meal, many cooks use packaged convenience foods. Most of these products are NOT nutrient-dense. Instead, they are low in healthful nutrients and high in calories, sodium, solid fats, added sugars, and refined grains.

There are ways that you can improve the health of these meals for yourself and your family. Try these ideas.

To decrease fat:

- Use only half the butter or margarine called for in the instructions of boxed mixes for rice, pasta, stuffing, potatoes, or macaroni and cheese. Omit all of it for even greater calorie savings.
- Reduce the fat in ground beef when making a hamburger casserole boxed mix by draining the fat from cooked ground meats. Then place it in a colander and rinse the meat with warm water. Let it drain, and continue with the regular directions.
- Substitute an equal amount of unsweetened applesauce for vegetable oil when preparing a boxed brownie or cake mix. Substitute two egg whites for each whole egg to decrease the fat and calorie content even more.

To decrease sodium:

- Only use half of the seasoning packet that comes with packaged rice mixes, dry soup noodles, and frozen stir-fry meals. Add the remaining half at another meal, if desired, such as when cooking plain rice or noodles. Or use it as a seasoning for slow-cooked meals.

To add nutrients:

- Add chopped or sliced vegetables – such a broccoli, tomatoes, or carrots – to a frozen pizza before baking it, and to canned soups.
- Add frozen chopped spinach to tomato-based sauces for pasta.
- Serve fresh or canned fruit for dessert instead of a sweetened food.
- If a packaged mix calls for 1 cup of milk, use 2/3 cup of non-fat dry milk powder and 1 cup of water instead. You will get twice as many nutrients, such as calcium, vitamins, and protein, in each cup.

*The Post Rock District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith Counties. Contact Jamie Rathbun at [jrathbun@ksu.edu](mailto:jrathbun@ksu.edu) or by calling 785-524-4432. Stay connected with “Post Rock Extension” on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Our website is [www.postrock.ksu.edu](http://www.postrock.ksu.edu).*



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