

## **Convenience vs. Scratch Lecture**

**Introduction:** Read “Where do you buy ‘scratch’?” from the UAVHET Tidbits

### **Lecture:**

Convenience food are used to shorten the time of meal preparation at home. Some foods can be eaten immediately or after adding water, heating or thawing; canned soup and frozen dinners are two examples. Other convenience foods such as cake mixes are only partially prepared.

Food technology has made convenience foods possible. Convenience foods are so much a part of our lives that we don't stop to think about the time when they were not available. Your parents or grandparents may be able to remember the first convenience foods they purchased. Many dehydrated foods were used during World War II. After the war, companies began marketing more dehydrated foods to the general public. For example, Pillsbury marketed the first cake mixes in 1948. The only flavors available were white and chocolate fudge. The company assumed that a family did not own a mixer. The instructions on the box directed you to beat the mix a specific number of strokes with a wooden spoon. These first cake mixes did not have the light texture that they do today. The texture was about as coarse as cornbread. It took Pillsbury about ten years to achieve a finer texture.

Some convenience foods have exciting histories. The convenience breakfast drink, Tang, was a flop when it was first available on the market. NASA picked it up in 1968 because it worked better in space than natural juices. Natural juices would cake in a vacuum. Tang did not cake under the same circumstances. Soon after it was used in space, the company that manufactures Tang advertised that astronauts drink it in space. Tang became popular almost immediately.

The amount of research and preparation that has been put into a convenience food affect its cost. The cost of convenience foods includes not only the food but also the processing, packaging, labor, management, shipping, and marketing. Some convenience foods cost the same as foods prepared from scratch. Other convenience foods cost a great deal more than foods prepared from scratch. The cost depends in part on what it would cost to purchase the ingredients individually. Some homemade foods prepared with basic ingredients cost less than the same convenience foods.

To purchase all convenience foods can require a larger food budget than preparing meals from scratch or in combination with convenience foods. The family budget must be considered when planning meals with convenience foods and foods from scratch. A family that is experiencing financial difficulty would not want to prepare all of their meals using convenience foods. Careful planning and price comparisons would need to be done. The desired amount, equipment, ingredients and supplies are additional considerations in planning.

Convenience foods allow family members with busy schedules to have a quick meal at home with or without family members. Families on the go may feel that the ease of preparing convenience foods makes up for the extra cost. The life style of families who use all convenience foods is different than the life style of those who prepare most meals from scratch. The amount of time spent interacting with family members during the preparation and cleanup of convenience food is less than with food prepared from scratch. Families who prepare meals from scratch or in combination with convenience food, therefore, have an advantage over families who do not spend very much time together. The ease of convenience foods increases the likelihood that people will eat alone at varying times of the day. Convenience food allow people to operate on schedules so independent from each other that family members won't spend time together unless they consciously schedule it. Mealtimes may be one of the few times family members come together. For many families mealtimes is a gathering time.

The nutritional value of a number of convenience foods is lower than foods prepared from scratch. For example, a frozen convenience meal may not include a large enough portion of vegetables and will exclude fruit totally. If a family did not supplement many convenience foods with fruits and vegetables it would be impossible to get the number of servings recommended in the Food Pyramid. Many convenience foods also contain a high percentage of fat. Some companies add certain ingredients to cut costs thereby creating products that have lower nutritional value than foods prepared from scratch. The ability to read labels is an invaluable skill when selecting convenience foods.

Convenience food and food prepared from scratch can help or hurt families if used at the wrong time. The decision-making process must be used as you consider your circumstances. Convenience foods and foods prepared from scratch will be more appropriate at different stages of your family's life. For example, some families are so busy during the week that convenience foods are the best way to meet nutritional needs. On weekends the same families may have more time to prepare foods from scratch and in combination with convenience foods.

When deciding whether to prepare foods from scratch or use convenience foods, the age and ability level of family members as well as the nutritional value of food must also be taken into account. Preparing a box of macaroni and cheese may be easier for a child who is home alone than preparing some foods from scratch. The ease of convenience foods can greatly simplify meal preparation for the elderly and people in poor health. People who live alone and have the income to purchase convenience foods often do so due to lack of motivation to prepare foods from scratch. Imagine that several people within the same family had different health considerations each requiring different foods. Convenience foods could greatly simplify the amount of preparation required.

Convenience foods can be used in creative ways. They can be added as an ingredient in a recipe. For example, condensed or dehydrated soups are often in casseroles, meat loaf, and dips. It is possible to combine convenience foods to create a new food. For example, a can of chili, hot chili and stewed tomatoes could be combined to make a chili that tastes like it was homemade.

Convenience foods save time because the selection and measuring of many ingredients has already been done. Convenience foods, however, do not completely eliminate the need to understand scientific principles and correct techniques. If you understand basic principles and the reasoning behind certain techniques, the preparation directions will make more sense and the likelihood of making mistakes is decreased.

**Overhead Transparencies:**

- Three Levels of Convenience
- Some Convenience Foods are Cheaper than Homemade because:
- Advantages of Convenience Foods
- Disadvantages of Convenience Foods
- Low Cost Convenience
- High Cost Convenience
- Convenience Foods Save Time But Can Cost More

**Ask: What are some convenience foods used regularly by individuals in your family as they prepare meals.**

**Lab: Time/Taste/Cost Comparison Lab**