

Getting thinner just got easier

There may have been something of a ready-meal backlash in the past few years, but choose yours wisely and they can seriously help you lose weight



Be inspired by Gisele, Rachel and Jen...

UK nutritionist Fiona Kirk (www.fionakirk.com) has some tips on how ready meals can help you shift weight.

1 Look at labels Different brands and products can vary enormously in calories, fat, sugar and salt content (see 'Swap your meals', right), but the good thing about a ready meal is that all the nutritional information is listed, so you can easily make informed choices.

2 Curb carbs after 6pm Fiona recommends you avoid starchy carbs (such as rice, potatoes or bread) after 6pm, unless you're working a night shift or doing something physical, as you don't need the extra energy at that time.

3 Add extras For the ultimate nutrient kick, fill your plate with veggies or salad. You can buy ready-prepared selections, but steer clear of ones in creamy sauces and ditch any dressings that come with salads. Use lemon juice or olive oil instead.

For a real nutrient boost, add crunchy vegetable shoots to your salads. Rachel Stevens is said to be a fan of the Good4U range, from £1.39 a pack at Sainsbury's.

4 Choose slimming ready snacks Go for things that will leave

you feeling fuller for longer. Try shop-bought smoothies, such as Innocent Yoghurt, Vanilla Bean & Honey Thickie, £1.99 for 250ml, which contain yoghurt but no added sugar. But always check the label, as some choices can pack a hefty calorie punch.

Another great tip is to keep a packet of nuts and seeds in your bag for quick refuel moments. However, keep it to around 20g (a palmful) a day, as they can also be calorific. Jennifer Aniston is said to love Good4U Vanilla Pumpkin Seeds, from 90p a pack.

5 Use ready soups Choose bean, meat or fish soups, which are low-calorie and filling, but avoid any cream-based varieties. Or go for 'just add water' options, such as Clearspring Organic Instant Miso Soup, £2.79 for four servings, available from health-food shops and www.goodnessdirect.co.uk.

6 Go spicy Eating spicy food can speed up your metabolism, making you burn more calories. So add chilli powder, chilli flakes

or paprika to your ready meals. Model Gisele Bündchen is said to love horseradish and chilli for their metabolic-boosting effects.

And to make things even easier...

Have slimming meals delivered straight to your door. It might sound a bit LA, but it's really not as expensive as you might think (and you could just do it for a week, say, to kick-start your new diet).

Having calorie-counted slimming meals and snacks delivered to your door isn't only the ultimate in convenience, it is also a pretty foolproof way to keep calories – and therefore your weight – down.

Try Diet Chef, from £47.53 a week (020 8242 6273; www.dietchef.co.uk) or Go Lower, a low-carb, high-protein plan, from £46.48 a week (0800 862 0099; www.golower.co.uk).

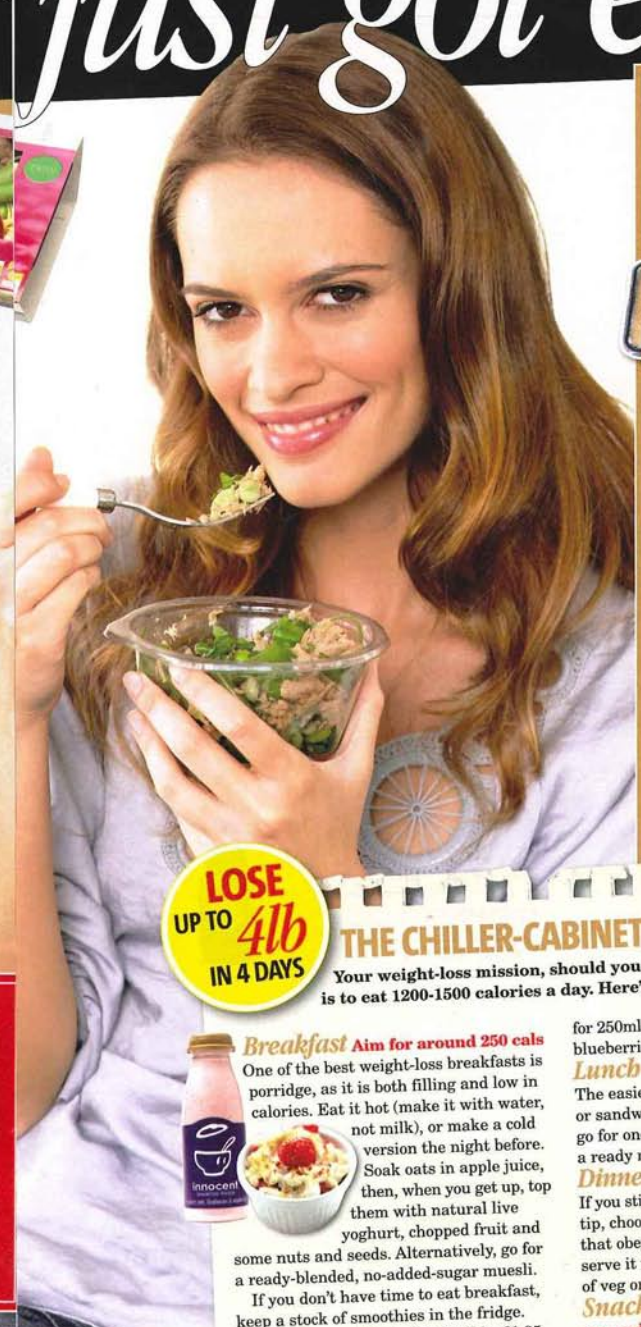
3 GREAT REASONS WHY READY MEALS CAN MAKE YOU THIN

* They are portion controlled, so it makes it easier for you to stick to... well, just one portion.

* They are ready in minutes, so you can keep a stash of healthy meals and snacks in your fridge-freezer. Then, when you get

hungry, you'll be less likely to munch on sandwiches, crisps and biscuits.

* They offer you the chance to try new recipes, so you're less likely to get bored with food while, hopefully, keeping down the calorie and fat content of your diet.



LOSE UP TO **4lb** IN 4 DAYS

THE CHILLER-CABINET PLAN

Your weight-loss mission, should you choose to accept it, is to eat 1200-1500 calories a day. Here's how to do it...



Breakfast Aim for around 250 cals
One of the best weight-loss breakfasts is porridge, as it is both filling and low in calories. Eat it hot (make it with water, not milk), or make a cold version the night before. Soak oats in apple juice, then, when you get up, top them with natural live yoghurt, chopped fruit and some nuts and seeds. Alternatively, go for a ready-blended, no-added-sugar muesli. If you don't have time to eat breakfast, keep a stock of smoothies in the fridge. We like Innocent Breakfast Thickie, £1.95

for 250ml, containing yoghurt, oats, blueberries and raspberries.
Lunch Aim for around 350 cals
The easiest option is a shop-bought salad or sandwich, but to keep calories down, go for ones without mayonnaise. Or buy a ready meal to pop into the microwave.
Dinner Aim for around 450 cals
If you stick to the no-carbs-after-6pm tip, choose a ready meal that obeys the rule and serve it up with plenty of veg or salad.
Snacks Aim for around 150-450 cals



SWAP YOUR MEALS

Not all ready meals are created equal. Here's a list of some top-selling meals – in both healthy and 'normal' varieties – so you can see just how easy it is to shave off the calories



SWAP THIS... Tesco Ham & Cheese Sandwich (177g) 470 cals, 22g fat
FOR THIS... Tesco Choices Ham & Cheese Sandwich (160g) 285 cals, 5.1g fat
SAVE: 185 cals, 12.9g fat

SWAP THIS... The Co-operative Lasagne (400g) 515 cals, 23.3g fat

FOR THIS... The Co-operative Healthy Living Beef Lasagne (400g) 370 cals, 8.4g fat
SAVE: 145 cals, 14.9g fat

SWAP THIS... Morrisons Chicken & Bacon Pasta Bake (400g) 579 cals, 26.8g fat

FOR THIS... Morrisons Eat Smart Chicken Pasta Bake (400g) 343 cals, 5.6g fat
SAVE: 236 cals, 21.2g fat



SWAP THIS... Marks & Spencer Chicken Tikka Masala (400g) 700 cals, 30g fat
FOR THIS... Marks & Spencer Count on Chicken Tikka Masala (400g) 400 cals, 6g fat
SAVE: 300 cals, 24g fat

SWAP THIS... Marks & Spencer Garganella Pasta Salad With Chicken & Basil Chicken (300g) 685 cals, 35g fat

FOR THIS... Marks & Spencer Count on Us Pasta With Tomato & Basil (230g) 330 cals, 6g fat
SAVE: 355 cals, 29g fat