

GROCERY STORE HELPERS

Vol 2: Prepared Sauces and Pastes

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We all need quick and easy meals at times, so having a few “grocery store helpers” available in the pantry is a great strategy for easing mealtime prep. Despite being warned away from the center aisles of the grocery store, many jarred sauces and seasoning pastes found there can still fit into a healthy diet, with more good options becoming available all the time. Many of these products contain nutrients and seasonings similar to homemade. It just takes a few minutes of reading the nutrition labels while shopping to select the best options.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Consider these label reading tips when choosing prepared sauces and pastes:

- Read the ingredient list and choose products that are simple and straightforward. If you find a long list of additives and items you do not know or cannot pronounce, it’s probably not the best choice.
- Look for products with low or no added sugar (preferably less than 5g per serving) and a reasonable amount of sodium. Low sodium is defined as 140mg or less per serving (or 5% Daily Value), while high sodium is 400mg or more per serving (or 20% Daily Value).
- Check the serving size on the nutrition label and consider how much of the product will be used in your recipe. For example, if the label says 400mg of sodium for 2 tablespoons paste and you will only be using 1 tablespoon, that sodium amount falls into an acceptable range. However, if a jarred pasta sauce contains 400mg of sodium per ¼ cup serving, and you plan to use ½ cup sauce per serving, the total sodium intake will be double what is listed which is quite high.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many prepared sauces and pastes available on the market represent a range of global cuisines making it quite easy to jazz up your weekly menus. Here are a few that I enjoy using.

Marinara Pasta Sauce

These are basic seasoned tomato sauces that can be heated quickly while the pasta cooks to create a simple comfort meal. Or, doll them up a bit with sautéed or roasted vegetables, ground meat and/or a healthy sausage.



- **Rao's Homemade Marinara Sauce**
- **Rao's Homemade Sensitive Marinara**
- **Kirkland Signature Organic Marinara Sauce**
- **Victoria Low Sodium Marinara**

Thai Curry Paste

There are several varieties of Thai curry pastes available - Red, Yellow, Green, Massaman, Panang to name a few. They are generally made of dried chili peppers, lemon grass, shallots, garlic, shrimp or fish paste, galangal, kaffir lime, coriander, cumin, and sometimes turmeric. The level of spiciness varies by brand. Panang and Massaman are usually milder than Red, Yellow or Green curry.



- **Thai Kitchen** - This paste is generally milder and can be found at most grocery stores or online.
- **Mae Ploy** - contains the highest sodium count per serving for the raw product of any of these listed but is still acceptable when divided by the number of servings for a dish.
- **Mike's Organic Curry Love - Red Thai Curry Paste**

Indian Sauces and Pastes

It's easy to create delicious Indian dishes at home with these simmer sauces and pastes. Add desired protein and vegetables, serve over brown rice or other whole grain and enjoy in less time than it takes to have take-out delivered!



- **Maya Kaimal Simmer Sauces**
- **Saffron Road Simmer Sauces**
- **Patak's Simmer Sauces and Pastes**

Mexican Salsa Verde and Enchilada Sauces

There are quite a few nice brands of green and red sauces available for making enchiladas or other Mexican dishes, but here are three I especially enjoy.



- **Frontera Tomatillo Salsa**
- **Herdez Salsa Verde**
- **Wegman's Roasted Salsa Verde**
- **Hatch Red Chili Enchilada Sauce**