

Frequently Asked Questions about Canned Fruits and Vegetables

Do canned fruits and vegetables have the same nutrients as fresh or frozen?

Yes! In fact, a new analysis from Michigan State University looked at the body of research and found that canned fruits and vegetables are nutritionally comparable with fresh and frozen and in some cases, even better. For example, canned tomatoes have more lycopene, which is associated with reducing cancer risk, and B vitamins than fresh tomatoes. Canning also helps make fiber in certain vegetables, like beans, more soluble, and therefore more useful to the human body.

Do canned fruits and vegetables lose their nutritional value the longer they are stored?

When fruits and vegetables go through the canning process, nutrients are locked in and don't dissipate over time, so the amount of vitamin B in a can of tomatoes is the same on the day it was canned as it is a year from the canning date. Fresh produce loses nutritional value day by day, and even frozen fruits and vegetables experience nutrient loss through oxidation.

Why are fresh and frozen vegetables more expensive than canned?

Many factors play a role in the cost of fresh vegetables, including seasonality, transport and something called edible weight. For example, all the corn in a can is edible, however, the cob of a fresh ear of corn is not consumable, yet you still pay for it. The Michigan State University analysis found that in general canned vegetables can be as low as 50 percent of the costs of frozen alternatives and as low as 20 percent of the cost of fresh with virtually no sacrifices in nutritional quality.

What is the cost differential between fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables?

The cost between fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables varies depending on the type of fruit or vegetable, but overall, canned fruits and vegetables offer a decided economic advantage. For example, the Michigan State University analysis found that fresh green beans are about 500 percent more expensive than canned. In addition, Americans end up wasting about 25 percent of the fresh fruits and vegetables they purchase every year, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Given the choice, shouldn't canned fruits and vegetables always be first choice?

At a time when only 33 percent of adults are meeting their dietary requirements for fruits and only 27 percent are meeting recommendations for vegetables, increasing intake in any form is strongly encouraged. Experts agree that eating more fruits and vegetables, whether canned, frozen or fresh is an essential part of a healthy diet. Given that canned options are comparable to and in some cases better options nutritionally and economically, they should be considered an equally good option. They are an excellent option for the 23.5 million Americans who live in "food deserts" where they have little or no access to healthy and nutritious foods.

Doesn't the government recommend fresh fruits and vegetables?

Canned fruits and vegetables, like fresh and frozen, are recommended in a variety of food and nutrition policies and initiatives including the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Let's Move, the US Thrifty Food Plan and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's DASH diet.

Aren't canned vegetables high in sodium?

A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released in February 2012 identified the top 10 food categories that contribute to high sodium consumption and canned vegetables were not identified. The food categories that add the most sodium to Americans' diets were bread and rolls, cold cuts and cured meats and pizza. Canned vegetables are available in sodium-free and low-sodium options and help provide vital nutrients that consumers need for a healthy diet.

Don't canned fruits have added sugars?

Canned fruits come in many varieties: canned in water, juice or syrup, so that consumers can decide what's best for them and their lifestyle and diet.

Are canned fruits and vegetables safe to eat?

The high heat canning process is one of the safest when it comes to preserving food because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause foodborne illnesses. In addition, canned fruits and vegetables are not susceptible to spoilage.

How long can canned fruits and vegetables be stored?

All canned foods are stamped with a "best by" or "use by" date to help consumers determine how long the items should be stored. In general, the canned fruits and vegetables you buy in the store today are good for at least one year.

How do canned fruits and vegetables impact the environment?

Canned foods in general are very environmentally friendly because the metal cans are endlessly recyclable. In fact, food cans are the most recycled package in America today.

How do canned fruits and vegetables compare to fresh produce in food waste and costs?

The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that about 25 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables are wasted every year. Consumers can cut costs two ways by eating canned fruits and vegetables: eliminating the waste of unconsumed fresh produce and paying less for canned fruits and vegetables than fresh and frozen at the grocery store.

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