

Canned Foods: Frequently Asked Questions

Nutrition

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

Yes! In fact, a recent 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.¹ For example, canned tomatoes have more lycopene, which is associated with reducing cancer risk, and more 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 foods lose their nutritional value the longer they are stored?

No. When foods go through the canning process, nutrients are locked in, 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.

Given the choice, should fresh 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,² increasing intake in any form is strongly encouraged. Experts agree that eating more fruits and vegetables, whether canned, frozen, fresh or juiced, is an essential part of a healthy diet. Canned options should not be overlooked, given that canned foods are comparable to and in some cases better options nutritionally and economically.¹ Furthermore, 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.³

Do the government and public health experts encourage canned food consumption?

Canned fruits, vegetables and meats are recommended in a variety of food and nutrition policies, and initiatives including the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans,⁴ Let’s Move,⁵ the U.S. Thrifty Food Plan,⁶ American Heart Association,⁷ Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics,⁸ and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute’s DASH diet.⁹

Are canned foods 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.¹⁰

The food categories providing the most sodium to Americans’ diets were bread and rolls, cold cuts and cured meats, and pizza. While soup was ranked among those with high sodium content, canned soup – as well as other vegetables and meats – has options for no-salt (sodium) added and lower-sodium versions. Plus draining canned foods alone reduces sodium by 36 percent, while draining and rinsing canned foods with water reduces sodium by 41 percent.¹¹

What type of canned foods are a good source of key nutrients and vitamins?

According to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a variety of canned foods are a great source of potassium, dietary fiber, calcium and vitamin D – all nutrients of concern.⁴

Selected Food Sources Ranked by Amounts of Key Nutrients/Vitamins and Calories Per Standard Food Portion

Potassium

Rank	Food
2	Prune juice, canned
3	Carrot juice, canned
6	White beans, canned
7	Tomato juice, canned
11	Clams, canned

Dietary Fiber

Rank	Food
22	Pumpkin, canned
25	Sauerkraut, canned

Calcium

Rank	Food
12	Sardines, canned in oil, drained

Vitamin D

Rank	Food
3	Salmon, canned
5	Tuna light, canned in oil, drained
7	Sardines, canned in oil, drained
8	Tuna light, canned in water, drained

Do canned fruits have added sugars?

According to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, canned fruits are not among the top sources of added sugar in the diet.⁴ Nevertheless, 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.

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Affordability

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.¹

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.¹ In addition, according to a recent study Americans waste approximately 15 percent to 20 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables every year.¹²

Safety and Storage

Are canned foods safe to eat?

Yes. 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 food products are not susceptible to spoilage.

How long can canned foods 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 foods you buy in the store today are good for at least one year.

Are foods in dented cans safe to consume?

Food in cans with small dents (no deeper than a finger) is safe to eat, as long as the dent is in the side of the can and not in the seam. Dents along the seams of a can may damage the seal and allow bacteria to enter, so should be discarded. But food in cans with small dents and without sharp points is perfectly safe to eat.

Why is Bisphenol A (BPA) used by can manufacturers?

BPA is used to create linings for cans that maintain the integrity of the can, prevent contamination and maintain the safety of the food. More specifically, can linings play an important functional role, safeguarding foods from microbial contamination. And, can coatings prevent perforation defects in the can that would allow bacteria and microorganisms to enter, thereby maintaining the integrity of the can and protecting against food poisoning and foodborne illness.

Are canned foods safe to consume given that Bisphenol A (BPA) is used in the can linings?

Yes! In fact, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration;¹³ World Health Organization;¹⁴ European Food Safety Authority;¹⁵ Health Canada;¹⁶ and other global agencies responsible for food products confirmed that BPA in the marketplace today poses no risk to consumers. BPA-lined cans have been effectively safeguarding the global food supply since they were first introduced in the 1960s, without a single incident of foodborne illness associated with canned foods since inception.

Why is BPA safe for canned food packaging, but it's banned in baby bottles?

Leading food safety agencies around the world – including in the United States, Canada and Europe – have reaffirmed the safety of BPA in food packaging.¹³⁻¹⁶ Baby bottle manufacturers voluntarily announced the removal of BPA as part of their marketing and advertising efforts, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) supports the industry's decision.¹³ The FDA did not, however, ban the use of BPA in baby bottles and sippy cups – this is a common misperception that was propagated by many major news outlets.

Are acidic foods more likely to absorb BPA?

No. According to a study published in *Environmental Science & Technology* in 2010,¹⁷ the acidity of foods did not appear to affect detectable BPA levels.

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Sustainability

How do canned foods 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.¹⁸ Their recycling rate is more than two-and-a-half times higher than that of most other packaging options. Additionally, cans are made with more recycled content than most package types, which reduces the demand for new natural resources.

How do canned foods help reduce waste and costs?

Because they are picked fresh and immediately processed to seal in freshness and flavor, canned fruits and vegetables are a product you can feel good about using at any time. According to a recent study, Americans waste approximately 15 percent to 20 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables every year.¹²

Canned meats and fish, such as chicken and tuna, are available in portion-controlled containers and can be enjoyed anytime, anywhere without requiring prior refrigeration.

Consumers can cut costs two ways by eating canned foods: eliminating the waste of unconsumed fresh produce or spoiled meat, and paying less for canned products at the grocery store.

Cooking

How do canned foods get people cooking?

Today's families are busy and most are on a budget. Canned foods provide a unique solution for healthier eating in today's fast-paced world. The can seals in freshness, flavor and nutrition without sacrificing convenience, enabling people to be confident about creating more – and more healthy – meals at home.

How does the canning process impact the food?

Canned fruits and vegetables, including beans, are a nutritious option because canning technology keeps food fresh and flavorful without a lot of preservatives and additives. Consumers can rely on cans for consistency and taste because the food that comes out is just as good as the day it went in. Check out the "Lifecycle of a Pea" infographic for a great tool on helping consumers understand this canning process.

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