

Frequently Asked Questions about Canned Foods

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Q. Is canned food as nutritious as fresh and frozen food?

A. The three-part study conducted by the University of Massachusetts found that recipes using canned ingredients are similar in nutritional and taste value to those made with fresh or frozen items.

Q. Does canned food have expiration dates?

A. Many canned products now have a "for best quality use by" date stamped on the top or bottom of the can. "Expiration" dates are rarely found on canned food.

Q. How long does canned food remain edible and retain its nutritional content after it is purchased?

A. Canned food has a shelf life of at least two years from the date of processing. Canned food retains its safety and nutritional value well beyond two years, but it may have some variation in quality, such as a change of color and texture. Canning is a high-heat process that renders the food commercially sterile. Food safety is not an issue in products kept on the shelf or in the

pantry for long periods of time. In fact, canned food has an almost indefinite shelf life at moderate temperatures (75° Fahrenheit and below). Canned food as old as 100 years has been found in sunken ships and it is still microbiologically safe! We don't recommend keeping canned food for 100 years, but if the can is intact, it is edible. Rust or dents do not affect the contents of the can as long as the can does not leak. If the can is leaking, however, or if the ends are bulged, the food should not be used.

Q. How long is it between the date of processing and the date of purchase? How can I find out the exact date of processing?

A. In a well-run supermarket, foods on the shelf will be rotated on a regular basis, so there is continuous turnover. However, if you want to learn the date a particular product was packed, some food companies use a series of numbers or letters that may contain a date. To "break the code," call the toll-free number or write to the address on the product. According to one manufacturer, its product code of 81382 indicates it was packed in 1998 (the first number, eight, is the year), on the 138th day (middle three numbers), by the second shift (the last number is two). The codes may differ from one processor to another. To be certain, call the company.

Q. Can canned food be heated in its container?

A. Yes. If it is necessary to heat canned food in the container, the top must be removed to prevent pressure build-up. The opened container may be covered loosely with a piece of aluminum foil. Then place the can in hot water and simmer.

Q. Does damage to the outside of the can indicate damage to the food?

A. Not necessarily, but some good judgment should be used. Rust or dents do not affect the contents of the can as long as the can does not leak. If the can is leaking, however, or if the ends are bulged, the food should not be used. These containers should be returned unopened to the place of purchase.

Q. Can you refrigerate canned food after use?

A. Yes. Unused portions of canned food can be refrigerated after use, but should be removed from the can and placed in storage containers first, to preserve its flavor.

Q. Should cans "hiss" when they're opened?

A. Some cans may hiss because they are vacuum-packed and the noise is a result of air pressure, which is perfectly normal. However, if a can hisses loudly or spurts when opened, it may be an indication that the food is spoiled.

Q. Are canned foods high in sodium?

A: Canned food is picked and heat-sealed into the can at the peak of flavor. In the case of some canned products, salt might be added to enhance the food's taste. However, today's canned food

provides a variety of options. For those consumers who are more sensitive to sodium, many canned products are available in low-salt and no-salt alternatives. To compare, read the nutrition facts on food labels to find the sodium in a single serving.

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