

Vegetables: Frozen vs Fresh

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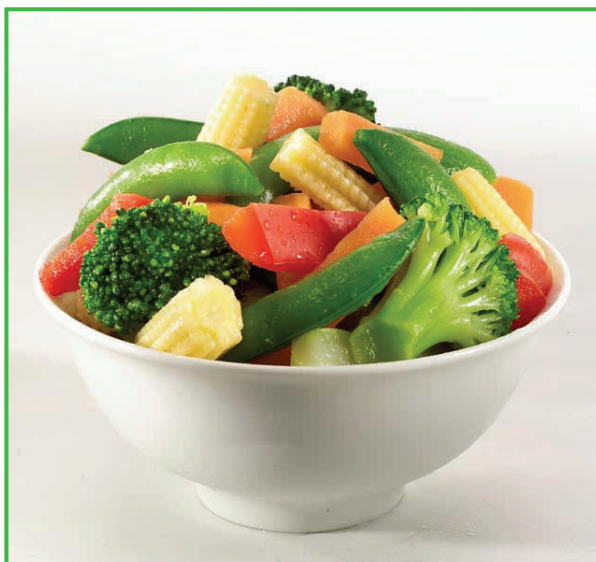
Which is better for you: fresh or frozen vegetables?

It is a popular misconception that all processed foods are devoid of nutritional value. Most frozen and canned vegetables are just as nutritious as their fresh counterparts, and in some cases provide even more nutrients than fresh varieties¹.

Fresh vegetables are exposed to a variety of conditions which cause changes in quality and nutrient content. Both length of time and temperature during transport and storage decrease levels of nutrients in fresh foods². Fresh vegetables typically spend 3-7 days in storage before consumption³. The longer vegetables are stored, the more vitamins they lose.

Frozen vegetables are picked and frozen soon after harvest. Once vegetables are frozen their nutrients are 'locked in' and further losses are minimised. Prior to freezing, vegetables undergo blanching, a process which inevitably leads to some losses of nutrients (particularly vitamin C and folate which are sensitive to heat), but in general these losses are no greater than those that occur during cooking.

A study conducted by the University of Illinois found that in most cases canned and frozen vegetables are comparable nutrition-wise to their fresh counterparts⁴. The study found that some nutrients such as carotene (a compound which is converted to vitamin A by the body) may actually be better preserved in frozen produce because packaging protects the vegetables from light, which destroys carotene.



Canned vegetables are generally higher in sodium (salt) than fresh and frozen varieties. Many manufacturers, however, offer low-sodium or 'no added salt' versions of standard canned vegetable products to meet consumers' nutritional needs.

Most Australians do not consume the recommended number of servings of vegetables each day⁵. Vegetables in any form (fresh, frozen or canned) can form part of a healthy, balanced diet. Frozen and canned vegetables also offer the convenience of reduced preparation time and year-round availability of seasonal produce.

Get the most from your vegies!

Benefits of frozen vegetables

- They are available all year long.
- Frozen vegies have similar nutritional value and health benefits as fresh varieties.
- They take less time to cook because they have already been blanched prior to freezing.
- They offer convenience and ease of preparation.
- They can be stored and used at another time.

- When selecting frozen or canned vegetable products choose those without sauces and seasonings, as they are sources of fat and sodium.
- Store frozen vegies in a freezer at about -18°C as soon as possible after purchase.
- Use frozen vegetables within 6 months of purchase or as recommended on pack.
- Store canned vegetables in a cool, dry place away from furnaces, hot pipes and the kitchen range.
- Water-soluble nutrients are lost from vegetables during boiling. You can minimise these losses by reducing the amount of water you use.
- Cooking methods such as stir-frying, steaming or microwaving cause less nutrient losses than boiling.

References

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