



What's Best: Fresh, Frozen or Canned?

Fresh foods are nutritious but they're not the only healthy choice. See how frozen and canned foods can help extend both your budget and your meals!



Fish

Fresh fish tends to be very expensive, and most “fresh” fish was actually flash frozen as soon as it came out of the sea, then thawed in the fish case. Canned fish is an incredible value (plus it's always ready on your pantry shelf), while your store's freezer case offers up grilled and herbed options that are much healthier than yesterday's fried and battered choices.



Fruits

Nothing compares to the taste of perfectly ripe fresh fruit. But most ripe fruit is very perishable, and nutrients are lost with prolonged shipping and storage. Frozen fruit is picked at the peak of ripeness and can be a good choice, though the texture will be different. Even canned fruit can have surprising health advantages: a study in the *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* (Feb. 2013) found canned peaches have significantly higher levels of vitamin C, folate and antioxidants than fresh. Just skip the heavy syrup.



Vegetables

Frozen vegetables are also picked at the peak of perfection. This affects not just flavor but nutrients, which continue to increase with ripeness, then degrade during storage – losing 10-45% of their nutrients by the time they land on your table. So choose a few of the freshest veggies to eat early in the week, then round out your meal plan with frozen choices as shopping day approaches.



Soups

Canned soups are often high in sodium, and much pricier than homemade fresh soup. Make a big batch of lentil soup, vegetable soup, or any family favorite, then freeze in single-serve portions that anyone in your household can warm up in minutes.

A fascinating study in the *Journal of Nutrition & Food Sciences* (2012;2:4) tallied costs—including purchase price, preparation time and waste—and nutrients for a wide range of canned, dried, fresh and frozen foods. They then computed the per-unit-of-nutrients value for each. While results showed that canned foods can offer a better value, their conclusion is one we can all agree on: “It is important to include a variety of foods into a well-balanced eating style.”