

## News Release

March 29, 1989

### CANNED FOOD SAFETY

Some of the most frequent calls that I receive from consumers in Ventura County deal with the safety of commercially preserved food in cans. Many of you are concerned about how long canned foods can safely be stored, if unused portions of food can be left in the can and so on.

I hope the following questions and answers will clear up most of your concerns about the safety of commercially canned foods:

1. Where should I store canned goods?

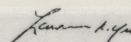
The best storage for canned foods is in a dry place at moderately cool but not freezing temperature. Avoid storage near steam pipes, radiators, furnaces and kitchen ranges.

2. How long will canned foods keep?

This will depend upon a number of factors such as the type of food canned, the processing it has received, how it has been handled, and the conditions under which it has been stored. Generally speaking, if the can itself is normal in appearance, the food inside should still be wholesome. However, a regular turnover about once a year is suggested.

3. What effect does freezing have on canned foods?

A slight breakdown of texture may occur in a few products, but otherwise a single freezing and thawing does not affect canned foods adversely. Some creamy foods may curdle or separate upon freezing but heating usually restores the original consistency.

  
Lawrence K. Yee, County Director/4-H Youth Advisor

During freezing, the contents of a can expand, putting a strain on the can seams and causing the ends to bulge. Check the container carefully after thawing, to be sure that the ends return to their normal flat appearance. If they do not, air has gotten into the can, and the contents will have lost quality.

4. Can opened canned food be safely under refrigeration?

Yes. Opened canned food should be refrigerated as you would any other cooked food. However, if the opened food is to be kept for a substantial period of time, it may be tightly covered, frozen and held frozen until use. Transferring into plastic freezer bags of appropriate size before freezing will assist in excluding oxygen and minimize drying. However, there may be some softening of texture.

5. Is it safe to leave unused portions of canned foods in the can after opening?

Yes, it is safe to leave food in the open can. It is important, however, to place the can in the refrigerator just as you would any other cooked food. Acid foods, such as grapefruit juice, may dissolve a little iron from the can if they stand in the refrigerator for a long time. This metal is not harmful or dangerous to health, but may cause a metallic taste in the food. If you are not going to eat such an acid product within a short time, empty the contents into a glass jar or other container.

6. Does damage to the outside of the can mean the food is unsuitable for use?

Not necessarily. A little rust or small dents do not affect the contents of the can as long as the can does not leak. However, if the can is leaking, or if the ends are bulged, or if the contents have an abnormal odor or appearance, discard the can without tasting the contents. In such cases, spoilage may have taken place.

7. What about the composition of cans themselves? I sometimes notice discoloration in the food or in the liner of the can.

The Food Additives Amendment of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act prohibits the use of food containers which would transfer a poisonous or harmful substance to the food in the can. Consumer may be confident of the safety of the cans found in the marketplace.

However, a harmless discoloration sometimes mars the appearance of the inside of the can. This is due to the liberation of sulfur by certain foods during processing, which causes an unsightly brown, blue or black mottling. The stains are not harmful to the contents.

An "etched" effect sometimes appears on the inside of cans, especially those which contain fruit juices. This does not indicate that the contents have been harmed.

8. Are metal fragments in canned foods harmful?

Investigations by Government agencies and industry scientists have shown that metal slivers which get into food cans when they are opened by can openers are not injurious to health. However, metal fragments are undesirable, and you should make every effort to keep them out of foods. Keep can openers sharp, clean, and in good working order.

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