

Fresh and Frozen and Canned, oh my!

By Karen Crawford MS, RD, CSP

Whether you're buying fresh, frozen or canned produce, you can offer your family the same great nutrients either way. No matter the form, fruits and vegetables are healthful foods that are necessary for a well balanced diet. Fresh varieties of certain fruits and veggies are not always available or at an affordable price; this is the perfect time to go with canned or frozen. Canned and frozen fruits and veggies are picked at their peak of goodness and preserved. Whereas fresh produce can be hard to determine the ripeness and can go bad before you have had to chance to eat them.

The nutrients in all three forms are so close you can call it equal. The freezing process does not destroy nutrients; recommended freezing times are based on quality, not safety. You can theoretically keep something frozen indefinitely, but the quality will suffer over time. Fresh, frozen and canned strawberries contain the same amount of vitamin A, C, iron and fiber. In addition, the calories per serving are similar too unless they are frozen or canned in syrup or sugar. Many times, fruits are frozen with sugar to help maintain color and flavor, thus adding more calories and carbohydrates. Similar is the case with veggies. The canning process may add sodium, yet the vitamins and calories remain the same as fresh or frozen.

Take a look below at two examples using strawberries and green beans.

STRAWBERRIES	CALORIES	FIBER	VITAMIN A	VITAMIN C	IRON	CALCIUM
<i>Fresh</i>	23	1.4	0.2%	71%	1.6%	1.2%
<i>Frozen (added sugar)</i>	100	1.4	0.2%	71%	1.6%	1.2%
<i>Canned (in heavy syrup)</i>	115	1.4	0.2%	71%	1.6%	1.2%

**1/2 cup servings*

GREEN BEANS	CALORIES	FIBER	VITAMIN A	VITAMIN C	IRON	CALCIUM
<i>Fresh</i>	17	1.9	7.6%	15%	3.2%	2%
<i>Frozen</i>	17	1.9	7.6%	15%	3.2%	2%
<i>Canned</i>	17	1.9	7.6%	15%	3.2%	2%

**1/2 cup servings*

So, looking for strawberries out of season but with the same great nutrient profile as fresh, choose frozen without added sugar or canned in water or natural juices. This goes for all fruits that are available in forms other than fresh. When looking for canned veggies, choose those that are “reduced sodium” or “no salt added”. When fresh is not an option, canned and frozen fruits and veggies can be a convenient and economical way to add color and variety to your meals.