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## Fresh, Canned, or Frozen --- What's Best?

When it comes to buying fruits and vegetables, many factors play a role in which types consumers choose, including nutritional value. The American Dietetic Association says no matter what form they take, fruits and vegetables are good-for-you foods that can be enjoyed at any time.

"While fresh fruits and vegetables are recommended, this does not mean they are the only healthy option," says registered dietitian and ADA Spokesperson Ximena Jimenez. "Research shows frozen and canned foods can be as nutritious as fresh. In fact, since some nutrients in canned produce are more easily absorbed in the body, these can sometimes be better nutrition choices than fresh."

Fresh, canned or frozen, Jimenez offers ideas for getting the most from your fruits and vegetables, no matter what form your produce takes:

### *For canned fruits and vegetables:*

- **Get the juice.** "For canned fruit, look for descriptions on the label like 'packed in its own juices,' 'packed in fruit juice,' 'unsweetened' or 'in syrup.' Fruits packed in juices contain less added sugar and fewer calories than fruits packed in syrup," Jimenez says.
- **Pinch the salt.** If you are cutting back on sodium, look for descriptions such as "no salt added" and "reduced sodium" on the labels of canned vegetables.
- **Savor the flavor.** Use canned fruits and vegetables immediately after opening for maximum flavor and nutritional value. "Handle leftovers as you would any perishable food," Jimenez says. "Remove them from the can, place in an airtight container and store in the refrigerator or freezer to retain taste and nutritional quality."

### *For frozen varieties:*

- **Forgo the fat.** When buying frozen vegetables, control fat and calories by choosing plain vegetables or those made with low-fat sauces.
- **Check the label.** "Frozen fruits come in both sweetened and unsweetened varieties, so make sure to check the label and choose unsweetened if you are limiting your sugar intake. Frozen fruit bars also make a nutritious snack, but read the label to learn if they're made with real fruit juice," Jimenez says.

### *Dried fruits:*

- **Pick the plain.** "Dried fruit contains lots of fiber, vitamins A and C, potassium and folate, but also more calories per serving than fresh fruit because of natural and sometimes added sugar," Jimenez says. "Also, some dried fruits are preserved with sulfite, which can trigger allergic reactions. So read the package label to make sure your choice is in line with your healthful and safe eating plan."
- **Have a handful.** "Dried fruit is a great portable snack. It can also jazz up salads, pancakes, bread recipes or a bowl of cereal," Jimenez says.

"There are thousands of varieties of canned and frozen fruits and vegetables on grocery store shelves, which makes it easy to find foods that suit your tastes and fit into a healthy eating plan," Jimenez says. "And it's always fun to try a new food or find a new way to cook your old favorites."

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