

SHARE article, for May 2004

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### Fresh or Canned, Which is Better?

Do you ever wonder if that soft green pepper or marked-down bag of green beans on the produce counter is worth buying? In the past, my answer has always been, if you have a choice, go for the canned or frozen, rather than less-than-ideal fresh produce. Now, I have to say “It depends - on the priorities of your diet.” What has changed, and why?

In general, unless the fresh produce is very fresh, a canned or frozen version will have more vitamins. Most produce is in the can and processed, or in the bag and frozen solid, within twenty four hours of being picked. While there is some loss of vitamins in the processing, once canned or frozen the vitamins are very stable. So, a can of green beans 6 months old has almost exactly what it had when it was one day old.

But, every time a bag of fresh green beans changes temperature, on and off a plane, in and out of a warehouse or a grocery back room, a few more vitamins break down. The more they are exposed to light, the more vitamins are lost. And if the produce is cut, bruised or damaged, the losses will be even faster. So, frequently, there is more food value in the canned or frozen.

But now the National Institute of Health has recommended that we all cut our sodium intake down to not more than 1,500 mg a day, barely half of what the previous recommendation was. At that very low level, we can't afford to eat much more than is absolutely necessary.

Many canned and frozen vegetables have salt added to them. Most fresh produce is naturally very low in sodium. If you can get the “No Salt Added” canned versions, they will be better than wilted fresh vegetables. But now I have to say that if you are carefully watching your sodium, if you have or are concerned about blood pressure, you may be better off getting the fresh produce. And for sure, high blood pressure needs to be a priority issue. Go for the low

sodium, high flavor fresh.