

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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It seems that our food industry is trying to make it as easy as possible for us to eat healthy. Have you noticed their latest offering? Now we can buy our frozen veggies all ready to microwave, packed in vented plastic bags ready to stick in the oven and be zapped. Have you tried them yet? Or have you tried the microwaveable bags in the paper goods section? You can buy them by the box, to use with any vegetable. Is this a great idea, or might there be some problems? What are the pros and cons of them?

One thing you won't need to worry about if you use them properly is safety. These bags have been tested for food contact and for heat. But remember, if the bag says it is to be used just once, then don't reuse it. If the bag says it's for plain veggies, then don't try to heat Alfredo sauce in it. Fats, oils and multiple heating can change how a plastic reacts with food. All bets are off if you don't follow the instructions.

On the positive side: They are definitely easy to use and easy to clean up. With instructions on the package, all you, your husband or the kids need to do is stick them in the microwave and hit the buttons for the right number of minutes. If that helps you or them eat more vegetables, go for it! More veggies will only help us!

Where this convenience might hurt us is in the pocketbook. Most of the vegetables packaged in the ready to cook bags are more expensive. To buy a box of just bags, you'll pay anywhere from 25 to 50 cents per bag. But you can cook the veggies just as quickly in a reusable covered dish that only needs to be washed before

the next use. Can your pocketbook stand the expense of 50 cents a bag just to cook a 99 cent package of carrots, or to heat a 59 cent can of beans?

Unfortunately a lot of the veggies in microwaveable bags also come with added sauce, which means added salt and fat. If you choose plain, nothing added vegetables you'll get more health with fewer problems. You can add the seasoning that you prefer - spices and herbs without the salt or a fat free dressing instead of a butter sauce.

Another potential problem is that a bag made to vent steam can also leak moisture. For short term freezer storage that won't be a problem. But if you buy large amounts to store for longer periods, you may well find more freezer burn. Don't buy more than you will use a couple of weeks for best quality. And if the food thaws or the bag is improperly placed in the microwave there will probably be leaks, drips and spills.

Another positive point is that, if you shop carefully, you will often find frozen plain vegetables that are less expensive than the fresh produce. Usually the frozen foods are also all ready trimmed, chopped, peeled and ready to eat. There is less waste of uneaten parts, so you waste less money. Frozen vegetables have almost the same nutritional value as fresh most times of the year, so they're very healthy.

But, if you will only eat part of a package of frozen veggies you'll either have to cook some in a different container to keep the rest frozen, or cook them all and then eat leftovers or refreeze the cooked part.

So, if buying vegetables in the ready to cook bags makes it easier for you to eat them, please do it! If you have to pinch your pennies, they probably aren't the best choice, but they are much better than no veggies at all. Try to get a variety of colors - some red, some green, some blue, some white, some orange. Put a rainbow of

vegetables on your plate throughout the week for that pot of gold of health at the end!

Here's a recipe that you can make in a steam cooking bag or in a microwaveable dish with a cover. It might be sweet enough to tempt a picky child to try the carrots. If you prefer a slightly more Asian flavor, add half a chopped red or green sweet pepper and a touch of soy sauce.

Fruity Carrots

1 pound frozen carrots or chopped fresh carrots	2 Tbsp brown sugar
1 Cup canned pineapple chunks, drained	1 tsp corn starch
½ tsp ground ginger	1 Tbsp margarine

Combine all ingredients in steam cooking bag or microwaveable dish. Mix well. If using frozen carrots cook according to time on package. If using raw carrots, cook on high 6 minutes. Allow bag to cool before handling. Shake bag or stir dish to coat carrots. Test for doneness, cook another 30 seconds or longer if needed until done. Serves 4.

(Adapted from Communicating Foods for Health)

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