

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Make It Easier on Yourself – Open a Can

With the first of the big-meal holidays almost here, your to-do list is getting longer, the shopping days till the next holiday are getting shorter, you're in a rush, and you still have to put meals on the table. What's the head cook to do, especially if you want to put healthy meals on the table? Open some cans!

Now before you turn your nose up at that suggestion, let me qualify it! Open cans of veggies with **no salt added**. Open cans of fruit **in juice**, or light syrup. **Read the labels** before you put the cans in your shopping cart! I am not suggesting that you pig out on cans of soup loaded with salt, or fruit drowned in the sugar of heavy syrup. But there are plenty healthy choices in the canned foods aisles.

Study after study has found that when the nutritional value of canned foods are compared to 'fresh' produce that was shipped from thousands of miles away, the canned are better. When compared to 'fresh' that sat in the back seat of the car, then on the counter, then in the refrigerator, then on the counter again before it finally made it to your plates, the canned is better. Frozen foods are often more nutritious than fresh too, but you still need to check for no added salts, sugars or fats in those convenient meals and 'starters'. They can be tricky, so read the labels carefully.

How can it be that canned are better? It's because the air, light and heat that fresh produce is exposed to during shipping and selling breaks down the vitamins and other nutrients. But sealed in a can, with no air or light, the canned foods actually keep more of their nutrition for us. The canning was the preservative, there's usually nothing else added. It's just vegetables and water. Go for it!

If that's not enough to take away your guilt for serving canned veggies, consider another point of view – your children. Recently a study came out that looked at how children have been eating from 2001 to 2010. (Yes, I know. Who has time to do some of these studies?!) What they found is that children who were commonly given canned fruits and vegetables usually had better diets overall. For one thing, they ate a lot more fruits and vegetables, which are often what are missing in our children's diets. The differences were pretty striking, 22% more veggies, and 14% more fruit. That's as much

as an extra serving or more a day.

They got a lot more fiber in their diets from all those fruits and veggies too. And they got more minerals, including calcium and potassium. We don't usually think of children needing to manage their blood pressure, just the parents do. But, blood pressure went up in children who were not eating as much canned produce, and stayed the same in the ones who did.

They also had more protein and less fat in their diets with extra canned goods. The protein might have come from beans, or maybe the families just had a bit more money available for chicken and fish and meat because they spent less on produce. The important thing is that these children were healthier, not fatter, on a diet that included canned fruits and vegetables.

Open a can of your family's favorite vegetable. Put in a microwaveable dish with just a little of the juice. Add the seasonings you enjoy. Decorate it with a little chopped sweet red pepper, or slivered onions, or even some lemon zest. Heat until it's warm enough, and serve. Fast, family friendly and nutritious is on the table.

Canned fruits are great for making a quick salsa, adding to salads, serving over cereal, yogurt, pancakes or even ice cream. Here's a super-easy way to hide some fruit in a child-pleasing favorite – brownies. Cut them into smaller pieces to make them last longer.

Sneaky Cherry Brownies

1 pkg (about 22 oz) brownie mix

2 eggs

¼ cup oil

1 can (21 oz) cherry pie filling

1-2 Tbsp hot water

Coat a 9x13 inch baking pan with cooking spray. Preheat oven to 350° F. Mix 1 cup of pie filling with the brownie mix, egg and oil in a bowl. Don't use a mixer, just a spoon. Spread in baking dish.

Combine rest of filling with enough hot water to soften and spread over the batter. Bake 45-50 minutes, until done in center. Cool, then cut into 32 pieces (cut 4 slices lengthways, then in 8 pieces crossways).

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