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## Safe Food Processing



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From farm to fork, food safety is a top priority and many traditional food processing methods help minimize food safety risks, including canning, freezing, drying, irradiation and pasteurization. These methods preserve food and help reduce bacterial growth that may cause food poisoning, helping to keep food safe.

### *Canning*

In your cabinet, you may find canned tuna, canned vegetables or even foods you canned yourself. The quality and nutrient content of canned goods remain relatively stable as long as the container and seal are intact, allowing for a long shelf life. Another safety advantage of canned foods is that they are tamper-resistant — any opening is clearly evident.

Washing and peeling produce before canning helps remove pesticide residues that may be on their surface. This is followed by cooking the food to high temperatures in a sealed and sterile container, which destroys bacteria and other organisms that can cause the food to go bad.

Some nutrients may be lost when the food is heated to high temperatures but canned foods often are just as nutritious as fresh and frozen foods. For tops in nutrition, choose canned vegetables without added salt and fruits canned in juice rather than syrup. Canned products are convenient, portable and quick to prepare — as they are already cooked during the canning process.

## *Freezing*

Freezing is an excellent way to preserve foods such as vegetables, meat and fish for a very long time. The only two foods that should not be frozen are eggs in their shell and canned foods in their original packaging. Freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely, so the recommended storage times are for quality alone. So what does freezing actually do?

Freezing is a food processing method that slows the growth of bacteria, yeasts and molds which may cause food spoilage and food poisoning. This method keeps food safe by storing perishable food well below the temperature at which harmful microorganisms thrive and keeps foods out of the danger zone, between 40°F and 140°F. Freezing also helps retain the nutrition and quality of foods for a longer period of time.

## *Drying*

Among the oldest methods of preserving food, the drying process removes moisture making perishable foods safe without refrigeration. Common dried foods include fruit, vegetables, beans and nuts. You can even find dried meat and fish.

Drying removes the moisture from foods, leaving bacteria without a key ingredient to grow — water. Dried foods can remain safe in dry, covered conditions at room or cool temperatures. A preservative generally used to keep dried protein-rich foods such as meat and seafood safe.

## *Pasteurization*

Pasteurization is the process used to heat raw milk, eggs and juice to a temperature high enough to destroy harmful bacteria and enzymes that cause spoilage. Unpasteurized products can be dangerous for everyone but those at high risk of food poisoning (pregnant women, older adults, young children and those with weakened immune systems) especially should avoid any unpasteurized products.

## *Irradiation*

Irradiation uses radiant energy to control spoilage and eliminate foodborne pathogens in foods without the use of heat. Fruits and vegetables, spices, eggs, seafood and meats may all be treated with irradiation to help them stay fresh, safe and maintain their quality longer.

Like other processing methods, irradiation is regulated and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Whole foods that have been irradiated must be labeled.

These food processing methods help keep food safe but they don't replace safe food handling in the home. Remember to wash, separate, cook and refrigerate food properly to help keep you and your family safe.

Reviewed February 2019 by Sarah Klemm, RD, CD. Published March 19, 2019. To learn more healthy tips, visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and consult a registered dietitian nutritionist. Info obtained from [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).