

SHELF-STABLE, CANNED, AND PACKAGED FOODS

How long is it safe to keep canned goods?

Low-acid canned goods such as canned meat and poultry, stews, corn, carrots and peas can be stored in the cabinet 2-5 years. High-acid foods like tomato-based salad dressings and sauerkraut should be used within 9-18 months. Store canned goods in a cool (below 85°F), clean, dry place.

Are cans of food that have been accidentally frozen still safe to use?

Frozen canned goods, whether left in a car, basement or cabin, can present health problems. Seams on cans may be compromised when cans freeze and the contents swell. The cans should be moved immediately to a refrigerator and allowed to thaw. After thawing, cook and use the food or cook and refreeze. If the cans were not thawed in the refrigerator, or if you suspect that the foods may have frozen and thawed more than once, discard them.

Can leftover food be stored in its can?

It is always best to transfer leftover food to a storage container intended for refrigerator use. Food left in the can may develop an off-taste as the food reacts with metals used in the can. However, this is a quality issue, not a safety issue. Fortunately, lead has nearly been eliminated as a metal used in the U. S. canning industry.

How long can microwaveable, shelf-stable entrees be safely kept on the kitchen shelf?

Many new types of packaging use plastic or paper containers instead of metal cans or glass jars. Think of these new plastic and paper type containers as flexible cans." Like cans, the contents have been heat treated (sterilized) to make them shelf-stable. Assuming there are no breaks or tears in the package, these products should maintain top quality for over a year if stored in a cool, dry place.

Which meat and poultry product packages require refrigeration?

Read the label carefully. If refrigeration is necessary for safety, the label must say "KEEP REFRIGERATED." If the package was purchased off the shelf, chances are the product will not require refrigeration until opened.

SHELF-STABLE HANDLING TIPS

1. Store shelf-stable products in a cool, dry place.
2. Do not store canned goods in any location such as a garage or cabin where the temperature may drop below 32°F or go above 85°F.
3. Place newly purchased packages behind older ones, so each package can be used within its recommended shelf-life.
4. Check labels carefully to make sure that the product does not require refrigeration. Check to see if a "Sell-by" or "Use-by" date is on the container.
5. Use high-acid canned goods within 18 months. Use low-acid canned goods within 2-5 years. Home canned goods should be used within one year.
6. Do not use cans or glass jars with dents, cracks, or bulging lids.

