



Family and Consumer Sciences

Preserving for Special Diets

People who are reducing their sugar and salt intake can safely preserve foods at home to meet their specific dietary needs. With just a few precautions and changes in standard recipes, many foods may be safely canned, frozen and dried at home without sugar or salt.

Persons on special diets should consult with their doctor, however, to determine exactly which foods and amounts they can consume.

Canning and Freezing Fruits without Sugar

The sugar specified in canning and freezing is not needed for safety, but does affect the color, flavor and texture of the fruits. Fruits may be frozen dry without sugar, or in unsweetened juice or water. Canned fruits may be canned in water, commercially unsweetened juice or juice extracted from some of the fruit that is being canned. Apple, orange, white grape or cranberry juice make good packing liquids for fruits.

To see if you like the fruit canned in water or fruit juice, first make a sample batch by boiling the fruit until tender in the liquid you plan to use for canning. Cool the fruit and liquid, then taste to see if it is to your liking.

For optimum flavor and texture, select fully ripe, firm fruit. The texture of fruits canned and frozen without sugar may be softer because the sugar aides in holding the shape and firmness of the fruit.

All canned fruits must be processed in a boiling water canner to be safe to eat.

Jams and Jellies with No and Reduced Sugar

Traditional fruit spreads require a specific amount of fruit, sugar, acid, and pectin in order to gel properly. If sugar is reduced, these products will have a syrup consistency. Pectins that require less sugar or no sugar for jelling are now available commercially. These modified pectins can be used with varying amounts of sugar, concentrated fruit juice or artificial sweeteners.

Because sugar serves as a preservative, the keeping quality is changed when sugar is reduced. Be sure to carefully follow pectin package directions for processing and storing these low-sugar products. Low and no-sugar spreads tend to mold more quickly than regular jams and jellies.

Canning Low-acid Foods without Salt

Salt is added to canned vegetables, meats, poultry, and fish for flavor and can safely be omitted. In place of salt, you might like to add a few teaspoons of lemon or orange juice to vegetables like carrots, asparagus and beets. Add a tiny amount of dried herbs such as oregano, basil or nutmeg to green vegetables. Try adding a little garlic, chipotle powder, or liquid smoke to fish and meats.

All low acid foods (vegetables, meat, fish and poultry) must be processed in a pressure canner to prevent the growth of *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. For an added margin of safety, boil all low-acid home-canned foods for 10 minutes before tasting.

Pickles

Many fresh pack or quick pickles can be made safely without salt; however, the flavor and texture will be different. Soaking vegetables in a salt brine (such as for bread and butter pickles) develops the unique texture. With no added salt, the texture will be quite different.

Salt decreases the growth of some bacteria and molds. In order to make the pickles safe, no salt pickles should contain at least a 1:1 vinegar/water ratio. Always make sure there is as much or more vinegar than the total of the other liquids in the recipe.

Many pickle recipes call for little or no sugar. These may be used without modification in a low-sugar diet. Sugar in pickles is used to add flavor and to balance the tartness of the vinegar. If sugar is eliminated from sweet pickle recipes, the end product will taste quite tart.

Salt is needed for fermented pickles and sauerkraut (made by sitting in a crock or jar for several weeks). The salt controls growth of the bacteria that produce acid to make the fermented products safe to eat. Low and no-salt versions of these pickles cannot be made.

Non-calorie and Low-calorie Sweeteners

Some low/no calorie sweeteners are not stable when heated or frozen and many have a reduced shelf life. Except for jams and jellies, if an artificial sweetener is to be used in preserving produce, it is best to add just before serving.

For information on using alternative sweeteners in food preservation, persons on therapeutic diets should refer to the inserts in low/no sugar product packages or literature available from manufacturers of alternative sweeteners.

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