Fruits of all kinds are packed with health benefits, and canned peaches are no exception. Like their fresh counterparts, canned peaches provide nutrients and antioxidants that are vital for health – and perhaps protective against some chronic diseases. At the same time, they deliver plenty of flavor and pleasure to the table – anytime, anywhere.

Canned Peaches: Naturally Nutritious!

Nutritionally speaking, canned peaches have a lot to offer. They’re naturally low in fat, sodium, and calories; they’re also cholesterol free. In addition, like many other fruits, peaches are nutrient-dense, which means they deliver a significant amount of nutrients for the calories they provide. Simply stated, their calories count for good nutrition.

Sweetened or not, canned peaches contain significant amounts of potassium, dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, and folate. According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005, nutrients of concern, meaning that they’re typically short-changed in diets, include vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber for adults; potassium and fiber for children and teens; and folate for some women.1

In an eating plan that’s “overall healthful,” how does the nutrition in canned peaches stack up? And how do those nutrients promote health?

Canning Locks “Goodness” In

Canned peaches are simply poached (or “cooked”) peaches, with their natural nutrition and flavor sealed in. The process is much like cooking or canning at home, except that it’s done on a large scale in a cannery.

For canning, peaches are picked at their peak ripeness for the most nutrition and best flavor. Then they’re cleaned, peeled, sliced, and canned right away, close to the orchard and usually within a day, to lock in those qualities. Canned peaches retain their peak qualities for about two years, as long as the seal is intact and the can isn’t bulging.

In contrast, peaches sold as fresh produce are often picked before they’re ripe. They can lose a significant amount of nutrients, flavor, and texture during the days of shipping, store handling, and storage at home, especially if they’re mishandled or kept too long.

How do the nutrition and flavor compare? Canning is cooking, so any changes in the nutrient content or flavor from the canning process are like those made by poaching peaches at home.

Two recent studies show that the nutrition of canned, frozen, and cooked fresh fruits and vegetables are comparable. The University of Illinois study compared 35 different fruits and vegetables, including peaches. Whether cooked fresh, canned, or frozen, these fruits and vegetables provided similar amounts of vitamins A and C, thiamin, carotenes, folate, potassium, and dietary fiber.2 Research conducted at the University of Massachusetts focused on 40 recipes prepared with canned, frozen, or cooked fresh ingredients. The findings: The nutrient content and sensory appeal were similar, concluding that significant differences in flavor and nutrition come from...
Despite the recent claims of popular diets, carbohydrates are a good thing! They’re the body’s main source of energy. In fact, just for normal brain function, the body needs at least 130 grams of total carbohydrate (from starches and sugars) a day. For overall good nutrition, 45 to 65 percent of calories should come from carbohydrates, equating to 225 to 325 grams of total carbohydrates per day for those who consume 2,000 calories daily. Like other fruit, canned peaches partner carbs with other important nutrients.

Dietary fiber has a unique “do list:” helping to reduce blood cholesterol levels and perhaps lower the risk of heart disease; aiding normal elimination; and promoting intestinal health. Fiber even plays a role in weight control; fiber in whole fruit or cut-up fruit such as canned peach halves or slices promotes a feeling of fullness after eating, with fewer calories than many other foods provide. The canning process doesn’t affect the fiber content, but actually may make fiber more soluble and better used in the body. To compare, fruit juice contains little or no fiber.

Sugars, shown as part of total carbohydrates, are the sum of natural sugars and any added sugars. Together they’re the “short form” of carbohydrates, composed of one or two sugar units. By comparison, starches and fiber are made up of many sugar units. Canned peaches contain natural sugars, called fructose, as well as added sugars if they’re packed in syrup. During digestion, sugars as well as starches eventually break down, becoming the simple sugars that provide energy. Any excess — from starches, sugars, or both in food, whether naturally occurring or added — gets stored as body fat.

Vitamin A in fruit and other plant-based foods comes in the form of beta carotene. Among its many tasks, vitamin A keeps eyes and skin healthy and promotes immunity. Being heat-stable, the vitamin A content of peaches remains high when canned and is comparable to the vitamin A in fresh and frozen peaches.

Vitamin C plays a role in the growth and repair of all body tissues. Beyond that, it helps heal cuts and wounds, helps the body use iron, and keeps both teeth and gums healthy. Because it’s unstable in heat, some vitamin C is lost when peaches are canned; the packing liquid retains some of the vitamin C lost during canning. Vitamin C is also lost with exposure to oxygen, so fresh uncooked fruit also loses some vitamin C when it’s stored improperly or kept too long.

Folate (folic acid) helps the body form red blood cells, essential for producing energy in body cells. And for pregnant women and those who may become pregnant, consuming enough folate reduces the risks of some birth defects. While fortified foods and supplements provide the most folate, fruits and vegetables, including canned peaches, also supply significant amounts. Folate is quite stable during the canning process.

Potassium, a mineral that gets little attention, may help to maintain healthy blood pressure and blunt the effects of sodium on blood pressure. That’s yet another reason to fit canned fruit into everyday meals and snacks. Minerals hold up well during canning.

Nutrition Specifics

**Peach Halves, Canned in Light Syrup**

**Nutrition Facts**
Serving Size: ½ cup (125g)  
Servings Per Container: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount Per Serving</th>
<th>%Daily Value*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calories 76</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium 0%</td>
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</table>

*Daily Value reflect average nutrient levels for a 2,000 calorie-a-day eating plan.

Fit for Healthful Meals and Snacks

With scientific evidence as the basis, health-focused initiatives from reliable sources agree: Fruit, including canned fruit, promotes overall health and reduces health risks. As part of an overall approach to healthful eating, canned peaches are nutrient-rich choices that help people follow today’s dietary advice:

♦ For overall health. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), encourage people to consume enough fruit, as well as vegetables, while staying within their energy needs. For fruit, the advice is two cups of fruit per day for those who need 2,000 calories daily, with a little more or less depending on individual caloric needs. Variety each day is recommended, too, as a way to provide the many nutrients and phytonutrients that different fruits provide. The Dietary Guidelines acknowledge all forms of fruit, especially whole and cut-up fruit, as healthful options: “In the fruit group, consumption of whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, dried), rather than fruit juice, for the majority of the total daily amount is suggested to ensure adequate fiber intake.”

♦ As an eating guide for health. USDA’s MyPyramid helps people follow the Dietary Guidelines’ advice and choose foods and amounts that match their personal nutrition and health needs. The advice for fruit: two cups daily for a 2,000-calorie-a-day eating plan, with more or less recommended depending on its 12 different calorie levels. A single fruit portion can be any size as long as the total adds up to the recommendation. That said, one cup of canned, frozen, or cut-up fresh fruit counts as a cup. Like the Dietary Guidelines, MyPyramid advises mostly whole or cut-up fruit, rather than juice.

♦ To encourage fruit and vegetable intake. The Produce for Better Health Foundation promotes the “Colors of Health” and “5 A Day The Color Way™,” in its advice for eating five to nine servings of colorful fruits and vegetables a day. It lists peaches as a yellow/orange option that helps promote heart health, vision health, a healthy immune system, and a lowered risk of some cancers.

♦ To lower blood pressure. The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan, from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, emphasizes fruit, along with vegetables, as part of a taste-appealing strategy to lower blood pressure. Potassium, magnesium, and fiber in many fruits and vegetables may help with blood-pressure control. As part of the DASH advice: four to five servings of fruit in a 2,000-calorie daily diet; one-half cup of fresh, frozen, or canned fruit counts as a serving. The DASH plan has four calorie levels.

♦ For cardiovascular health. The American Heart Association offers dietary and lifestyle recommendations for cardiovascular-disease risk reduction. Its advice: “Consume a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.” For heart health, fruit is recognized for what it has: fiber, which may help lower blood cholesterol levels, as well as the antioxidant vitamins (beta carotene and vitamin C), which may be heart protective. In heart-healthy snacks and meals, fruit is also regarded for what it doesn’t have: no cholesterol, essentially no fat, and little sodium.

♦ For reducing cancer risk. ACS Recommendations for Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention from the American Cancer Society (ACS) advise “a healthy diet, with an emphasis on plant sources.” In this guidance, the advice goes on, “Eat five or more servings of a variety of vegetables and fruits every day.” One-half cup is a serving. Fruits (and vegetables) contain a complex mixture of cancer-fighting nutrients and phytonutrients that appear to protect against various cancers. ACS notes that canned and frozen fruits can be as nutritious as fresh.

♦ For improving nutrient intake among young children and women. The proposed WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children from USDA) guidelines, from the Institute of Medicine report, provide increased support for fruit in healthful eating. The current WIC food packages include only vitamin C-rich juice. To encourage fruit consumption, the proposed WIC food package also includes canned fruit as a fruit and vegetable option for young children and pregnant women and women who are breast-feeding.

♦ For improving nutrient and fruit intake of school-age children and teens. USDA’s National School Food Ser-
vice Program provides guidelines for fruit, which include canned fruit, for its school breakfast, lunch, and after-school snack program.

**Canned Peaches for Convenient Nutrition**

With their long shelf-life, canned peaches provide convenient nutrition all year long, not just during the summer season. In a well-stocked pantry, canned peaches can be stored within easy reach, making them a quick and nourishing snack choice. Unlike fresh peaches that must be enjoyed right away, canned peaches keep their peak quality until they’re needed. Canned peaches take little time and effort to prepare; they’re already cleaned, sliced, and ready to use in salads, salsas, smoothies, desserts, and other mixed dishes — or to enjoy just as they are.

Softer in texture than many raw fruits, canned fruit also provides an easy and nourishing option for those who need softer foods. That may include young children or people with oral-health issues or other health conditions.

Canned peaches packed in juice, light syrup, and with no-sugar added are nutrient-rich choices for those who need to manage diabetes or control calories and for those who need or choose to limit added sugars for other reasons.

**Canned Peaches: Safe to the Plate**

With food safety as a consumer concern, canned vegetables and fruits, including canned peaches, offer another benefit. Packed in tamperproof containers, unopened canned fruit and vegetables are safe from bacteria or other contaminants, as long as the can doesn’t leak or bulge and the seal is still intact. Once opened, canned fruit and vegetables are perishable and need to be properly stored in the refrigerator.

Canned fruits need no preservatives. Heat from the canning process sterilizes the can and destroys bacteria that cause spoilage and food-borne illnesses. Sometimes vitamin C in the form of citric acid is added to help peaches keep their color and firm texture; that adds a bit more vitamin C, too.

Most food-borne illnesses happen at home, due to poor food handling. Raw fruit and vegetables may be at greater risk for contamination than their canned or frozen counterparts. The reasons? Raw produce may not be cleaned carefully. It may be contaminated by utensils, cutting boards, or refrigerator bins that haven’t been properly cleaned, or eaten after spoilage starts to set in.

**Taste Matters, Too!**

It’s well known that taste matters in today’s marketplace. That said, peaches for canning are naturally sweetened in the orchard. Picked when they’re ripe and canned at their peak, canned peaches deliver fresh flavor any time consumers open the can.

To match different taste preferences, a variety of canned peaches are sold, offering many choices to consumers. Among the products: peaches sweetened and packed in fruit juice, light syrup, or heavy syrup; or flavored with non-nutritive sweeteners, spices, or other flavorings. While consumers are advised to go easy on added sugars, canned fruits aren’t a major source of added sugars in the American diet.¹¹

¹¹"Food Sources of Added Sweeteners in the Diets of Americans.” Guthrie, JF and Morton, JF, Journal of the American Dietetic Association

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¹"Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005.”  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005,  
www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines


³University of Massachusetts Nutrition Study, Parts I, II and III,” University of Massachusetts, 2000. For a full report, refer to www.mealt ime.org


⁶Five A Day The Color Way. Produce for Better Health Foundation, www.5aday.com

⁷Your Guide to Lowering Blood Pressure with DASH, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, 2006,  
Www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash

⁸American Heart Association for Cardiovascular Disease Risk Reduction, American Heart Association, 2006,  
www.americanheart.org

⁹ACS Recommendations for Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention, American Cancer Society, 2006,  
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with%20tables.pdf

¹¹"Food Sources of Added Sweeteners in the Diets of Americans.” Guthrie, JF and Morton, JF, Journal of the American Dietetic Association