Nutrition of freeze-dried vs. raw fruits and vegetables

Dear Alice,

How do freeze-dried vegetables and fruits compare with fresh ones in nutrition?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Ever try freeze-dried ice cream in a pouch designed for astronauts? Well, freeze-dried foods are no longer just for space travel! They are now available to anyone who enjoys snacking on the go and there are a lot more options than just ice cream.

The main difference between freeze-dried foods and fresh foods is water. Freeze-drying is a process that preserves food by removing 98 percent of its water content. This prevents food from spoiling, while still maintaining most of its flavor, color, texture, and nutritional value. Some freeze-dried food can last for several years! Just remember that if you’re eating a lot of freeze-dried foods, you want to stay extra hydrated to make up for their lack of water. Also keep in mind that the freeze-drying process involves chemical treatments. While most of the chemicals used in these processes are FDA approved and regulated, it is good to be aware that some chemicals may have adverse health effects, particularly for those who have a sulfite sensitivity. So, the question is, are freeze-dried fruits and veggies good for you?

Research has shown that while freeze-dried fruits and vegetables contain slightly lower amounts of certain vitamins, they are rich in antioxidants and fiber. Most researchers agree that the amount of nutrients lost from freeze-drying is miniscule.

What about calories? Because freeze-dried fruits and vegetables lack water, they are highly concentrated, which means they contain more calories than their original form. Confused? Think about it like this: if one cup of a particular fresh fruit is 100 calories, when you freeze dry that same amount of fruit it will shrink in size. So, one cup of freeze-dried fruit will contain more pieces of fruit than one cup of fresh fruit. This translates to more calories. This is why nutrition experts recommend that freeze-dried foods might be added as a supplement to someone’s diet, but should not act as a replacement for fresh foods.

In any form, fruits and vegetables provide you with vitamins and nutrients that are essential to your health. Whether you choose fresh or freeze-dried, it’s a good idea to include plenty of fruits and vegetables in your daily diet. The recommended number of servings varies from person to person, but general guidelines suggest between two and six servings daily. You can calculate your recommended daily intake on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.
For more resources on how to keep up a healthy diet, check out Columbia’s get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating [3] and other Alice! Health Promotion nutrition initiatives [4]. Both provide useful tips on how to stay healthy, all of which are easy to incorporate into your everyday life.

Alice!
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