



## Nutri-Facts

Issue #16, March, 2002

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Greetings all!

March is National Frozen Food Month, so this issue focuses on the advantages of using frozen foods. Sales of frozen foods have risen over the years and this is a trend that is expected to continue, given the consumer demand for quick and easy-to-prepare foods. Easy-to-prepare is sometimes translated into "fool-proof" and although just about every type of food can be found in the frozen food section, proper selection and storage is a must to ensure quality and safety. Also, if smart shopping skills are not considered (i.e. unit pricing), some frozen foods can be expensive when compared to canned or fresh. This issue addresses those concerns.

The issue includes an agent information sheet, consumer fact sheet, and a news release for use in your local news paper or newsletter.

As always, I appreciate any comments/suggestions for future issues of Nutri-Facts.

Eat Well,  
Jenna

## Agent Information Sheet - Nutri-Facts #16, March 2002

### Frozen Foods - Don't Get Left Out in the Cold

What do the following foods have in common: peach turnovers, waffles, broccoli, and orange juice? The answer is that all of these foods are readily available to consumers in frozen form.

March is national frozen food month and although our economy has slumped a bit, sales of frozen foods haven't chilled. In 1999, supermarket sales of frozen foods were estimated at more than 27 billion dollars. This figure is expected to grow as new products enter the market to meet the needs of consumers. Some of the most popular frozen food products (according to sales figures) include seafood (\$990 million in sales), breakfast foods (\$896 million), potatoes and onions (\$857 million), meat (\$829 million), and desserts and toppings (\$760 million). Frozen baked goods generated approximately \$385 million dollars in sales during 1999 and over 40% of those sales came from frozen garlic bread alone!

There is no doubt that consumers like frozen foods. According to the American Frozen Food Institute, consumers spend approximately \$17.70 per person per year on frozen foods. Children have the largest impact over frozen food purchases as it is estimated that these young consumers influence 50% of what families eat at home. In fact, frozen entrees are among the most frequently served meals at home

### Why frozen foods make good sense (and cents)

For households trying to save time and money, frozen foods can be a good buy for several reasons:

**Convenience:** Frozen foods are definitely convenient. When a consumer buys a bag of frozen vegetables, for example, the picking, dicing, and chopping have already been done. All one has to do is remove the package from the freezer, heat, and serve. The same holds true for a frozen pizza. The dough has been prepared and the pizza has been assembled with the sauce, toppings, and cheese. Again all the consumer has to do is heat and serve.

**Economy:** In many ways, frozen foods compare favorably to take out or home prepared foods. Let's look at pizza. The chart below compares the cost per serving (slice) for a cheese and pepperoni pizza among a popular pizza chain, popular frozen pizza, and a pizza prepared at home.

Pizza Type	Total Cost	Cost per slice
Take out pizza from popular restaurant	\$10.78	\$1.35
National brand of frozen pizza	\$5.89	\$0.98
Pizza prepared at home**	\$8.61	\$1.08

**\*\*Note:** the pizza prepared at home consists of a pre-prepared pizza crust, tomato paste, tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, and pepperoni.

Remember, in some cases, canned or fresh varieties may be more economical than frozen foods, especially if store brands, coupons, or in-store specials are offered. Don't forget to use unit pricing when considering the economical value of a food item.

**Less waste:** With frozen fruits and vegetables, you don't pay for (or get) the stalks, pits, skins and rinds. Instead, you get food that is 100% edible.

For small households, many frozen food products have been developed which serve two or three people. For households characterized as DI NKS (double-income, no kids) “empty-nesters, or older adults who live alone and have limited food preparation skills, these foods are popular products. In addition, single serving desserts are readily available which make it possible for family members to have their favorite desserts without incurring the expense and time of preparing large quantities of each item. **Note:** Some frozen items (particularly entrees and t.v. dinners) are high in sodium. This can be a challenge for individuals who must watch their salt/sodium intake. If this is the case, try to select frozen entrees and dinners that are labeled “low-sodium,” “no-salt-added”, “reduced sodium,” or “sodium-free.”

**Quality:** Unlike fresh fruits and vegetables, which are often seasonal, frozen foods are consistent in their quality. When preparing foods that use out-of-season fruits and vegetables, the frozen variety often makes an excellent substitute (from both a quality and economical standpoint).

**Cost comparison:**

1 pint of fresh strawberries (in January) = \$3.99

1 bag of frozen whole strawberries = \$2.39

**Buying the “Freshest” Frozen Foods: What Consumers Need to Know**

Frozen foods are not indestructible. In fact, when selected and stored improperly, the quality of frozen foods can diminish considerable. The National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association offers the following tips to help consumers select and store frozen foods to ensure the highest quality:

- (1) Choose packages that are clean and firm. Packages that are discolored or have large amounts of frost may suggest that the package has not been kept at the proper temperature during storage or transport.
- (2) Only buy ice-free, undamaged packages.
- (3) When shopping for food, make the frozen food department your last stop in the supermarket.
- (4) Pack all frozen food together to help maintain their cold temperature.
- (5) Return home immediately from the grocery store and place all frozen foods in the freezer. If your trip home is more than 30 minutes, store the frozen foods in a cooler to help keep them cold.
- (6) Buy frozen food from a store with a well-managed frozen food section.

**Guidelines for Storing Frozen Foods**

- (1) Keep freezer temperature at 0 degrees F or below.
- (2) Put a purchase date on all frozen food products then rotate foods, putting newly purchased items in the back of the freezers. Use products on a “first in, first out” basis.
- (3) Organize the contents of your freezer by food type. Put baked goods in one section, meats and entrees in another section, etc. That way, you are not digging into the freezer looking for that last loaf of garlic bread.

- (4) If frozen foods need to be thawed, use the refrigerator to ensure maximum quality. Make sure the temperature in your refrigerator is no higher than 40 degrees F.
- (5) Unless there are ice crystals present on the package, partially thawed frozen foods should not be refrozen for both safety and quality reasons.
- (6) Keep your freezer clean to prevent the transfer of off-tastes and odors. An open box of baking soda placed in the freezer is a good way to remove freezer odors.
- (7) For highest quality, try to use frozen foods before they exceed their maximum storage time. The chart below illustrates the recommended storage times for selected food items.

Food Item	Storage Time in Freezer	Food Item	Storage Time in Freezer
Commercially prepared bread/rolls	2-3 months	Ice cream, ice milk and sherbet	1-2 months
Juice	12 months	Fish sticks (breaded)	3 months
TV dinners	2-3 months	Fish (lean)	6 months
Vegetables (commercially frozen)	8 months	Fruit	12 months

For a more complete list of storage times for foods, refer to the *Safe Home Food Storage* (Texas Cooperative Extension publication B-5031) which is available at the following web site: <http://agpublications.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Foods.html>

#### Recipes using selected frozen foods:

The following recipe was obtained from the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association (<http://www.easyhomemeals.com/homepage.html>) More recipes are available from this web site. **The name brands of foods used in these recipes are not intended to be an endorsement for these food companies.**

#### Tyson Chicken Pasta Parmigiana (Makes 4 servings)

##### What you need...

- 1 package (10.5 oz.) Tyson® Chicken Breast Patties
- 1 jar (26 oz.) pasta sauce
- 8 ounces pasta, **cooked**
- 1 cup grated reduced fat mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Continued on next page....

### **How to make it....**

1. Wash hands. Make sure all food preparation surfaces, dishes, and utensils are clean.
2. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
3. Heat pasta sauce on the stove top or in a microwave.
4. Mix cooked pasta with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the sauce and coat thoroughly.
5. Spread pasta mixture evenly in a 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  quart shallow baking dish.
6. Place chicken patties on the pasta and drizzle with remaining sauce.
7. Sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese.
8. Bake for 15 minutes.

**Be sure to refrigerate any leftovers immediately.**

**Menu idea:** serve with a tossed salad or green beans and garlic bread or rolls.

**For more information about frozen foods, check out the following web sites:**

American Frozen Food Institute: <http://www.affi.com/>

National Frozen Food Association, Inc. <http://www.nffa.org>

National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association: <http://www.nfraweb.org/>

**For more recipe ideas:**

Birds Eye foods: <http://www.birdseye.com/>

Green Giant foods: <http://www.greengiant.com/>

# CHILLING OUT

## with Frozen Foods

Sales of frozen foods have risen over the years, a trend that is expected to continue due to the consumer demand for quick and easy-to-prepare foods. For households that are interested in saving time and money, frozen foods can be a smart choice for several reasons. However, as with fresh and canned foods, proper selection and storage of frozen foods is a must to ensure quality and safety.

### How to Buy the “Freshest” Frozen Foods

1. Choose packages that are clean and firm. Packages that are discolored or have large amounts of frost may suggest that the package has not been kept at the proper temperature during storage or transport.
2. When shopping for food, make the frozen food department your last stop in the supermarket.
3. When checking out at the grocery store, make sure that frozen foods are packed together to help maintain their cold temperature.
4. Return home immediately from the grocery store and place all frozen foods in the freezer. If your trip home is more than 30 minutes, store the frozen foods in a cooler to help keep them cold.
5. Buy frozen food from a store with a well-managed frozen food section.



freezers.

Use frozen foods on a “first in, first out” basis.

3. Organize the contents of your freezer by food type. Put baked goods in one section, meats and entrees in another section, etc. This will help you keep track of the foods you have available.
4. If frozen foods need to be thawed, use the refrigerator to ensure maximum quality. Make sure the temperature in your refrigerator is 40 degrees F or below.
5. Unless there are ice crystals present on the package, partially thawed frozen foods should not be refrozen for both safety and quality reasons.



### Storing Frozen Foods for Safety and Quality

1. Keep freezer temperature at 0 degrees F or below.
2. Put a purchase date on all frozen food products then rotate foods, putting newly purchased items in the back of the
3. For best quality, try to use frozen foods before they exceed their maximum storage time.

Have you noticed how many Americans are in a hurry? Americans are spending less and less time preparing meals. As a result, the need for quick, easy, and tasty meals has made the frozen food market soar.

March is national frozen food month, and although our economy has slumped a bit, sales of frozen foods haven't chilled. In 1999, supermarket sales of frozen foods were estimated at more than 27 billion dollars. This figure is expected to grow as new products enter the market to meet the needs of consumers. According to sales, some of the most popular frozen food products include seafood (\$990 million in sales), breakfast foods (\$896 million), potatoes and onions (\$857 million), meat (\$829 million), and desserts and toppings (\$760 million). Frozen garlic bread accounted for 40% of the frozen baked goods sales of \$385 million dollars alone.

Frozen foods are not only convenient, but they are also a way to save time, money, and reduce waste. When a consumer buys a bag of frozen vegetables, for example, the picking, dicing, and chopping have already been done. You don't pay for (or get) the stalks, pits, skins, and rinds; you get food that is 100% edible. All one has to do is remove the package from the freezer, heat, and serve. Another example is frozen pizza. No need to make the dough, spread the sauce, slice the vegetables, and shred the cheese. Just remove the packaging and cook. No assembly required.

Although frozen foods seem fool-proof, they are certainly not indestructible. In fact, when selected and stored improperly, the quality of frozen foods can diminish considerably. To help consumers select and store frozen foods to ensure the highest quality the National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association offers the following tips:

- (1) Choose packages that are clean and firm. Packages that are discolored or have large amounts of frost may suggest that the package has not been kept at a proper temperature,
- (2) Buy only ice-free, undamaged packages,
- (3) When shopping for food, make the frozen food department your last stop in the supermarket,
- (4) Pack all frozen food together to help maintain temperature,
- (5) Return home immediately from the grocery store and place all frozen foods in the freezer,
- (6) Keep your freezer temperature at 0 degrees F or less, and
- (7) If frozen foods need to be thawed, use the refrigerator to ensure maximum quality.

For more information about frozen foods, contact \_\_\_\_\_, county Extension Agent, at \_\_\_\_\_(phone number).