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 and save on their food bill. Foods may be safely canned, frozen and dried at home without sugar or salt.

Persons on special diets should consult with their doctor and Registered Dietitian 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 canned in water or natural fruit juices such as apple, white grape or orange juice in place of sugar syrups generally recommended for canning. Try a variety to see what you like. Good combinations are peaches canned or frozen in orange juice, pears in orange or apple juice, berries and dark cherries in cranberry or grape juice.

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 and taste to see if it is to your liking.

For optimum flavor and texture, select fully ripe, firm fruit. It is best to can using the hot pack method. The texture of fruits canned and frozen without sugar may be somewhat mushy 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.

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 nutmeg, oregano, basil to green vegetables. Try adding a little garlic 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.

Jams and Jellies with No and Reduced Sugar
Sugar in regular fruit spreads promotes gel formations and serves as a preservative. To make low and no sugar spreads, use special pectin products that have been developed for this purpose.

Regular pectin requires a specific amounts of fruit, sugar, pectin and acid in order for the product
to gel. 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.

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.

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

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. Eliminating salt from pickles that have at least as much vinegar as water would be safe, however.

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.

**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. Add just before serving for best quality.

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 manufactures of alternative sweeteners.

Source: Family Food Education Program

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