

Irradiated food lasts longer

Q How and why are foods irradiated? What foods? How can consumers tell if foods have been treated with irradiation?

A. The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last spring gave its approval to the increased use of irradiation of certain foods.

Food irradiation at the approved levels (spelled out in the regulation) will provide the food industry with an additional way to lengthen the shelf life of foods and also protect these foods from insects without creating a health hazard to consumers.

The FDA has allowed irradiation of wheat and wheat flour since 1963 and white potatoes since 1984 to control insects and to slow sprout growth. Irradiation was not frequently used, however, because of other less expensive methods.

In 1985, pork was approved for irradiation to prevent the parasite trichinella spiralis, which causes trichinosis.



consumer mailbag

Terry Gibb

IN APRIL 1986, the FDA added fruits and vegetables, dry or dehydrated herbs, spices, seeds, teas and vegetable seasonings to its list of irradiation-approved foods. Irradiation was approved to slow growth and ripening and to control or kill insects and microorganisms.

One method of food irradiation has packaged food traveling on a conveyor between 6¼-foot-thick concrete walls into a chamber. There it is exposed to gamma rays from a radiation source — usually cobalt 60. The conveyor speed and radiation dosage are controlled by a computer.

When food is irradiated, most of

the radiation passes through the food without being absorbed. The small amount that is absorbed is what kills any insects, extends the shelf life and prohibits premature ripening of fruits or vegetables.

Exposing foods to these rays (either gamma rays, electron beams, or x-rays) does not make the food radioactive, nor does it pose any radioactive danger to consumers.

ONE ADVANTAGE of irradiation is that it leaves no chemical residue on foods as do chemical pesticides. Irradiation does, however, cause some minor chemical changes in food. It can also affect the flavor and

texture of some foods, and, to some extent, even the nutrient content of foods. But these are the same changes that occur when food is cooked, canned or frozen.

In addition to specifying which foods may be irradiated and what the limit of radiation is allowed for each food, the new regulation requires that all irradiated foods sold at the retail level must be labeled, stating that the food was "treated with radiation" or "treated by irradiation."

A special logo must also be displayed on the label of irradiated products. This logo consists of an outer circle with five breaks in the upper half. Inside the circle is a solid ball above two petals.

The entire regulation is published in the April 18, 1986, Federal Register.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The consumer mailbag, Concern Detroit, 1025 Shelby, Detroit 48226.

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There is evidence that diet and cancer are related. Follow these modifications in your daily diet to reduce chances of getting cancer:

1. Eat more high-fiber foods such as fruits and vegetables and whole-grain cereals.
2. Include dark green and deep yellow fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins A and C.
3. Include cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts, kohlrabi and cauliflower.
4. Be moderate in consumption of salt-cured, smoked, and nitrite-cured foods.
5. Cut down on total fat intake from animal sources and fats and oils.
6. Avoid obesity.
7. Be moderate in consumption of alcoholic beverages.

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