

Shelf Stable Meats

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Meat products that can be stored at room temperature without the risk of microbial spoilage are considered to be shelf stable products. They include canned meats such as ham, tuna and chicken, jerky, dry sausages, snack sticks, summer sausage and freeze dried meat. Because these products do not need cold temperatures for preservation, they are popular for camping trips, hunting and fishing expeditions and other activities where refrigeration may not be available. In addition, they are convenient products to have on hand in your cupboard.

A variety of methods are used to preserve shelf stable meat products. For centuries, people salted and dried thin strips of meat which could then be stored to be eaten later. Salting and drying are still used today to preserve some products such as jerky and country hams. Freeze drying, another method used to dry meat, essentially removes most of the water from meat so bacteria cannot grow. The resulting product is lightweight making it convenient for camping, but the texture is dry and hard. To use freeze dried meats, you must add water and allow the meat to absorb the moisture before consuming the product.

Canning, designed to destroy the bacteria responsible for botulism, is used to make canned products shelf stable. Unlike dried meats, canned meats are moist. Summer sausage may be marketed as a refrigerated or shelf stable product. During the past few years, an increasing number of companies have developed a shelf stable summer sausage. To achieve this, a combination of acidity and vacuum packaging are used. As long as canned meats and shelf stable summer sausage remain unopened, these products may be safely stored at room temperature. Once the package is opened, it is recommended that uneaten product be stored in a refrigerator.

Many shelf stable meat products can be stored indefinitely without the risk of microbial spoilage as long as the original package is not opened. The quality of the product, however, may change over time. Since food is dynamic, reactions among food molecules are continually occurring. This can lead to changes in the texture, color, flavor and aroma of the product over time. For this reason, many companies may indicate a use by date on the product label so consumers receive optimum product quality.

Shelf stable meat products offer consumers convenient, good tasting products that do not need refrigeration.