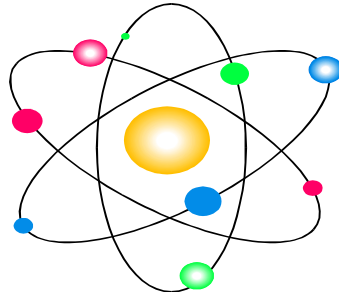


# FACTS ABOUT IRRADIATED FOOD



Irradiated food, including fresh fruit, vegetables, pork, spices and seasonings is now on sale in selected stores nationwide. Some other food, such as shrimp, is irradiated for export only.

## What is irradiated food?

It is food that has been treated with high doses of ionizing radiation.

## What is meant by high doses?

100,000 rads, that is, roughly equivalent to 10 million medical x-rays.

## Why is the food being treated with radiation?

High energy irradiation produces complex chemical changes that form what are called radiolytic products. These in turn kill some bacteria, molds and insect larvae which makes the food resistant to spoilage. If there were no harmful effects from the radiation, the level of deaths from starvation in the world could be substantially reduced and without the use of toxic fumigants and insecticides.

## What happens with the bacteria radiation doesn't kill?

Deadly botulism is radiation-resistant. And it's possible some other microorganisms will mutate under radiation and become even more dangerous.

## But will the radiation hurt me and my family?

While some experiments seem to show that *low* doses of "natural" radiation *may* be beneficial for us, as in iodine, iron, sunshine and water, *concentrated* extracts of radiolytic products have never been tested for cancer and other delayed, adverse effects.

## Why hasn't the government tested the radiolytic products?

Private industry and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) insist that irradiated food has been thoroughly tested and is absolutely safe. The FDA approved food irradiation in 1986, in spite of some test results that showed some negative effects.

## What kind of negative results?

Rats and other test animals experienced an increase in testicular tumors and kidney disease and a shortened lifespan. Some animals fed irradiated wheat developed cells that contained more than the usual number of chromosomes. It is felt that more-sensitive tests are needed.

### **Is the food really going to be on sale in every store?**

Not yet. New York, New Jersey and Maine have prohibited the sale and distribution of irradiated food. In addition, several foreign governments, among them Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand, have also banned it.

### **Even if irradiated food doesn't harm us, is it as good as food that hasn't been irradiated?**

Irradiation reduces levels of essential nutrients in food, especially Vitamins A, C, E and the B complex. Cooking irradiated food reduces those levels still further. The industry knows this and suggests we take vitamin supplements.

### **Are there any other changes in the food?**

Irradiation causes changes in foods' taste, smell and texture. Dairy products and some fruits are especially prone to such changes and are inappropriate candidates for irradiation.

### **How will I know I'm buying irradiated food?**

At first, food had to be labeled "treated with ionizing radiation" but now the FDA only requires that producers put a "radura," a tulip-shaped international symbol and the made-up word "pico-waved" on labels. As soon as the FDA thinks the symbol is well enough known, only the symbol will appear.

### **Does irradiated food still have to be wrapped to keep properly?**

Unpackaged food is not protected from bacterial contamination after irradiation.

### **Are there any other problems with irradiated food?**

Accidents have already been reported in facilities that sterilize medical supplies by irradiation. Required transport and handling of radioactive materials pose serious occupational and environmental hazards.

Efforts to use an accelerator instead of radioactive cobalt-60 or cesium-137 to produce machine-generated microwaves may lessen the dangers if adopted around the world. But food would still have to be treated locally for the irradiation process to be practical and affordable.



### **A Project of Consumers for a Healthier World**

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