

Cans Gone Bad – Is it Safe to Eat the Food Inside?

Dented Cans

Small dents – if a can has a small dent that does not affect the rim or seal and the can is in good shape otherwise, the food should be safe to consume.

Deep dents - a deep dent is one that you can lay your finger into. Deep dents generally have sharp points. Sharp points, especially those along the top or side seams can damage the seam and allow bacteria to enter the can. **DISCARD THE CAN**

Dented rims – cans that have dented rims (even tiny dents) should be **DISCARDED**.



Bulging and Leaking Cans



Bulging and/or leaking cans can be caused by freezing, improper storage, overfilling of the can during processing, denting or contamination by spoilage bacteria. Since the cause of the bulging or leaking can is unknown those cans must be **DISCARDED**.



Rusted Cans

Surface rust – if the rust can be easily removed by rubbing with a paper towel or your finger, the canned foods are safe to consume.

Heavily rusted cans – the can could have tiny holes in them from the rust where bacteria have entered the can. **DISCARD THE CAN.**

Rust inside the can – if you open a can and there is rust inside; **DO NOT EAT THE FOOD.** Rust (oxidized iron) is not safe to consume.



What is the Danger?

Commercially processed canned food is a very safe way to enjoy many fruits, vegetables and other products year-round in your kitchen. However, knowing when to discard or reject a can to prevent foodborne illness is important. Those dented, rusted, bulging or leaking cans aren't worth risking your health for the minimal cost of the canned food inside. Spoilage bacteria can make you ill and botulism could kill you.

Botulism, while extremely rare, is a toxin or poison produced by the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum* (*C. botulinum*) is a very serious danger in canned goods. Botulism is a deadly food poisoning. The botulism bacteria grow best in anaerobic (absence of oxygen) conditions. Since the canning process forces air out of food, the *C. botulinum* bacteria may find damaged canned foods a good place to grow and produce the toxin. Low-acid vegetables such as green beans, corn, beets, and peas, which may have picked up *C. botulinum* spores from the soil, are at risk.

Never use food from containers showing possible botulism warnings — leaking, bulging, or badly dented cans; canned food with a foul odor; milky liquids surrounding the vegetables that should be clear; or any container that spurts liquid when you open it. Don't even taste the food!

How to Discard Cans Gone Bad

Carefully throw suspect canned goods away. Never open suspect cans (leaking, bulging, dented, etc.) to discard them; if spoilage bacteria or botulism is present you don't want to contaminate your kitchen or take the risk of being exposed. You don't want animals, children, or anyone else who might rummage through the trash to get ill. Double bag the unopened cans in plastic bags that are tightly closed. Then place them in a trash receptacle (non-recyclable trash) outside of the establishment.

Resources:

https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/shelf-stable-food-safety/ct_index

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/dented_cans_on_sale_and_safe

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodScienceResearch/LaboratoryMethods/ucm109398.htm>