

## Now Getting Your Apple-A-Day Is Easier Than Ever

*A new process makes it possible to buy ready-to-eat, sliced apples that won't go brown on the grocery shelves.*

You've heard the expression, "an apple-a-day keeps the doctor away" since you were a child. Apples are one of our favorite fruits in America and they are rich in nutrients and fiber that helps keep us healthy. Easy to grab and take on-the-go, apples are becoming even more convenient thanks to a new process that allows them to be sold already sliced and ready-to-eat!

With the busy lifestyle of many Americans today, the food industry is constantly seeking for ways to make foods more convenient, easier to prepare and ready-to-eat – just grab and go, some like to say. We see this with less nutritious foods like single serving size nachos and cheese and other snack foods, as well as prepackaged mini-bowls of cereal with milk, yogurt with granola and other combinations.

The trend for quick, convenient foods has healthy alternatives, too. In the produce section, you can find pre-washed salad greens, bite-size baby carrots, and some pre-cut fruits like melons and oranges. However, the challenge has been in preserving fruits and vegetables that tend to brown quickly after cutting like bananas, potatoes, and apples. Not so anymore for apples!

A new treatment of FDA-approved vitamins and minerals that includes certain calcium salts has been developed to maintain freshness in sliced apples after they are cut, packaged, and shipped to the market. Through a joint effort between the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and a private food industry company, Mantrose-Hauser Company, Inc., this product was developed to keep apples fresh and free of color, taste or texture changes for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

Marketed under the name *Nature Seal*, the patented product is sold to food companies for use on apples. Fresh, sliced apples treated with *Nature Seal* will be available very soon in schools, supermarkets and on salad bars throughout the U.S.

Ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables – considered *lightly processed* – have seen increasing demand over the last many years. According to a report from the ARS, ready-to-eat produce already makes up approximately 10% of all produce sales in the U.S. – totally nearly \$10 billion annually.

Some surveys have shown that children are more likely to eat apples if they are served cut, and with the existing demand for convenience foods already, ready-to-eat sliced apples are likely to become a popular addition in the produce section.

Apples are a rich source of *phytochemicals* – plant nutrients - that are thought to reduce the risk of certain diseases like cancer and heart disease. Because apples are high in soluble and insoluble fiber, eating apples regularly can help keep the intestines healthy, keep blood sugars steady, and reduce the risk of heart disease by binding cholesterol and pulling it out of the body. Apples are fat-free, cholesterol-free, sodium-free and are filling because of their density. A medium apple constitutes full serving of fruits for the day and only contains about 80 calories.

Evidence shows that healthy diet low in fat and cholesterol and high in fruits and vegetables can reduce your risk for many chronic diseases and help you maintain a healthy weight. Apples can be a delicious part of that healthy diet. Now getting your apple-a-day will be even easier to fit into your busy schedule - conveniently sliced, fresh, and ready to eat.

*References:*

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