- Refrigeration



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1

MYTH:

You need to cool down leftovers before they go in the fridge.

MYTHBUSTER

Nope—you can put warm, or even hot, food directly in there. In fact, that's better than leaving it out to cool, says Jennifer Pallian, a Vancouver, Canada–based registered dietitian and food scientist. Cooling food in the fridge "reduces the time it spends in the danger zone—between 40°F and 140°F—where bacteria multiply quickly," she says. Just be sure to split up large quantities, like a big batch of soup or a piece of meat, into several shallow containers so they'll cool faster. And cover leftovers to avoid contamination. "A large number of microorganisms are cold-tolerant and live in the fridge," says Bryan Quoc Le, Ph.D., a food scientist and the author of *150 Food Science Questions Answered*. And while modern fridges can handle the heat from hot food, it's still smart to keep warm leftovers away from sensitive items like dairy products and meat, he adds.

2

MYTH:

You can't refreeze foods after you've thawed them.

MYTHBUSTER

It's fine to refreeze foods—even multiple times—if you do it right: Refreeze only food that was thawed in the fridge or cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F and that hasn't sat out for more than two hours, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Food thawed in the microwave or in cold water must be cooked before you refreeze it, because it may have entered the temperature danger zone. "Cooking can kill any bacteria that may have grown during thawing, making the food safe for freezing again," Pallian says. Safety, though, isn't the only thing to think about: Some foods just don't look or taste right after being refrozen. "Dishes with cream sauces, soft cheeses, and certain dairy products can separate or change texture," Pallian says.





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3

MYTH:

The best place to keep eggs is on the door.

MYTHBUSTER

The fridge door is actually the *worst* place to keep eggs. Why? It is the warmest spot and has the least stable temperature. "Opening and closing the door creates these fluctuations, and the door has many points at which heat can enter through cracks," Quoc Le says. That's important, since the U.S. Food & Drug Administration says that fridge temperatures of 40°F or less help reduce salmonella risk. To limit bacteria growth, eggs "need a cold, calm, stable environment," says Kasiviswanathan Muthukumarappan, Ph.D., a professor in the agricultural and biosystems engineering department at South Dakota State University. He recommends putting them on the middle or bottom shelf, as these are coldest.

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MYTH:

You shouldn't keep canned food that has been opened in the fridge.

MYTHBUSTER

It's safe to pop that half-full can of tomato paste into the fridge, Quoc Le says, but there are a few caveats. You should cover the can tightly with aluminum foil or plastic wrap, he says, to prevent germs and mold spores from getting into it. That will also stop the food from taking on the flavors of whatever else you have in the fridge. And you should treat opened canned foods like any other leftovers and toss them in three to four days. Still, the fact that it's safe to refrigerate food in a can doesn't mean you really want to: "Food—particularly acidic foods like tomatoes, citrus-based products, and vinegar-based sauces—can absorb a metallic taste from the can once it's opened," Pallian says. To better preserve the food's quality and flavor, the USDA recommends putting leftovers in food-grade plastic or glass containers.

5

MYTH:

Fruits and veggies are fine in the same fridge drawer.

MYTHBUSTER

To keep produce fresher longer, in the fridge or on the counter, keep it separated. Some fruits—like bananas, apples, tomatoes, and avocados—produce ethylene gas as they ripen, "and that can quickly speed up the decaying of nearby vegetables, especially ethylene-susceptible ones like leafy greens, broccoli, and cucumbers," says Muthukumarappan.

Various fruits and veggies also do better with different crisper drawer settings: Ethylene gas–producing fruits like apples and ripe avocados keep best in low humidity, Pallian says, while high humidity is ideal for veggies that tend to wilt or lose moisture such as leafy greens, carrots, cucumbers, and broccoli. Separating produce this way will save money and cut down on waste, says Muthukumarappan.

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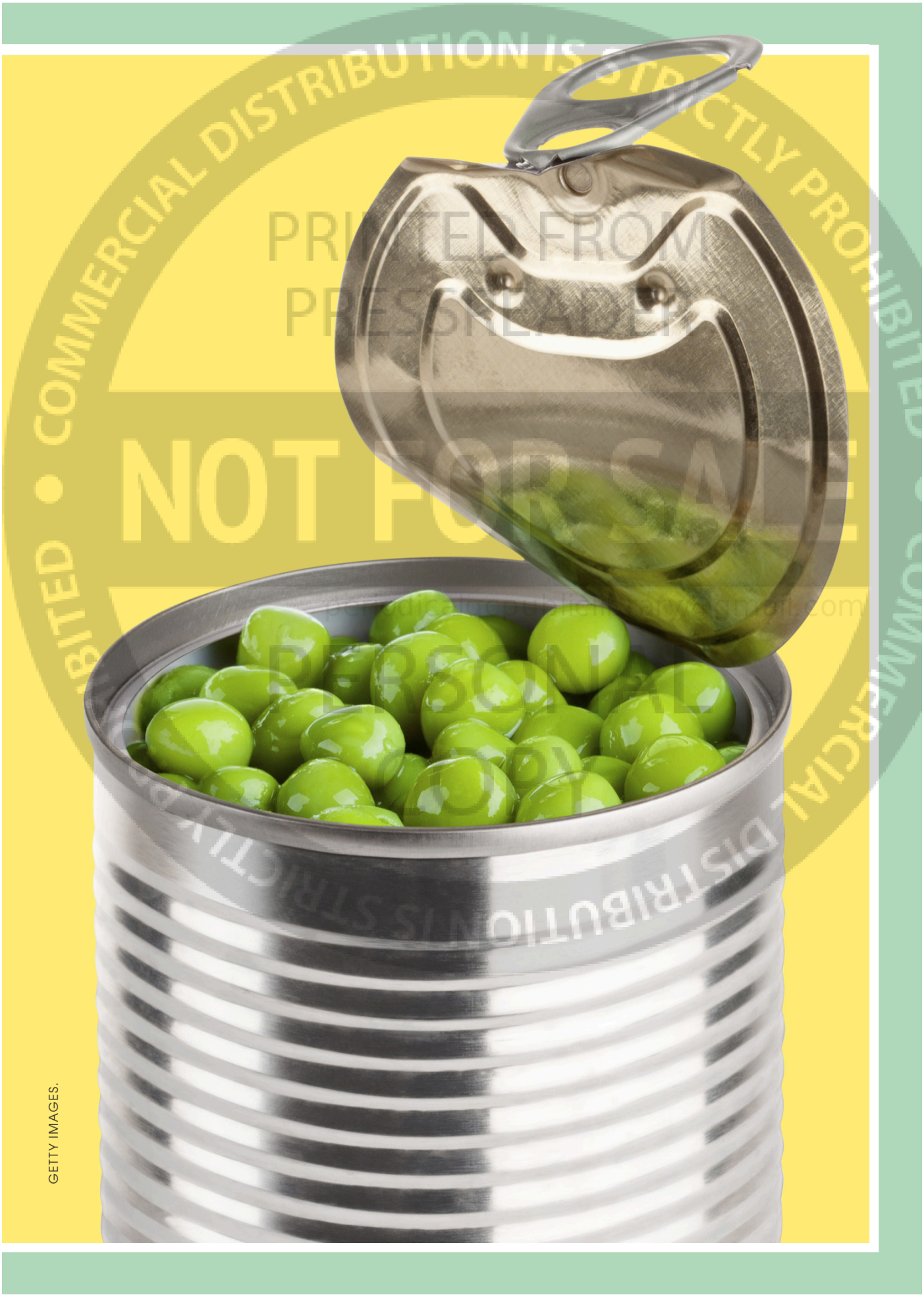

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