

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Ready to Go Fruit

Have you eaten at McDonald's recently? Even if you don't go there often, you've probably seen their huge new billboards or TV ads announcing their fruit and walnut salad or their apple slices with caramel dip. Have you wondered why their apple slices don't turn brown? After all, a lemon juice dip only works for awhile at home. Before long your apple salad starts to fade around the edges, so how do theirs stay so white? What about the packages of sliced apples in the store?

Of course the immediate suspicion is that somebody's adding 'chemical preservatives', right? Well, maybe. There are two different answers, and neither is bad. In fact, not all browning is bad. We expect tea to be brown. We want the crust on a loaf of bread to brown. It's just some fruit that we want to stay pale.

But to turn brown there has to be some type of sugar or acid, and for some kinds of brown, there has to be an enzyme to change the pale starch and sugar into something brown. There also needs to be some air around. But not all fruit does turn brown. Some varieties of peaches have been developed that do not make the right enzymes or have the right acids or sugars. They will stay yellow for a very long time. Unfortunately most apple varieties do start turning brown as soon as they are cut. When air hits that cut edge, reactions start to happen. There are several ways to stop the browning. Every pie baker knows the trick of dipping or sprinkling apple slices with lemon juice to keep them pale and pretty.

The active ingredient in lemon juice is ascorbic acid, the technical name for good

old Vitamin C. Pure vitamin C works for a longer time than lemon juice, but even it won't keep apple slices white as long as McDonald's needs. However, half the 'preservative' on those apple salads is vitamin C.

The other half of the secret is another common nutrient, something that many of us don't get as much as we need - calcium. Calcium helps stop the browning, and also prevents the slices from softening or getting mushy. There's not enough to make the apple salad count as a source of calcium in your diet, but it does make them look a lot nicer.

Both of these, vitamin C and calcium, work by stopping the action of the fruit enzymes with air. If they can't work, the brown colors never get made. The method of coating fruit slices with vitamin C and calcium was developed by the US Agricultural Research Service. There are no secret chemical preservatives. When the fruit is properly treated, apple slices will stay white for as long as a month. Not only does the color stay pale, the texture of the slices also stay nice, crisp and crunchy just the way we like them.

McDonald's expects to sell 54 million pounds of apples this year, so if you must eat at McDonald's, be sure to get your share. Have an apple salad, or at least the apple with caramel dip. The caramel is low-fat, so either choice is a lot healthier than a cheeseburger!

Keep your eye out for the sliced, bagged apple slices in the grocery too. They're available some places. They'll be a great treat for the children this summer, easy to give out, and not as wasteful as giving a whole big apple to a small child.

Here's an unusual apple recipe. The grated apples add a nice sweet touch to the balance the sharp cheddar cheese. It's almost like an old fashioned apple pie with

cheese, but a lot quicker to make, and lower calories too. Do not over-cook after you've added the cheese or it will be tough and chewy!

Apple-Cheddar Egg Scramble

1 C liquid egg substitute

1 tsp honey

½ C grated, unpeeled apples

1 T butter or oil, or use pan spray

¼ C low fat sharp cheddar cheese, cut in small cubes

Lightly beat the egg substitute with the honey in a small bowl. Stir in the grated apples.

Heat a skillet with the butter, or use pan spray. Add the egg mixture. Stir as it starts to cook. When it's about half done, add the cheese cubes. Stir and finish cooking, about three minutes total. Serves 2.

(Source: The US Apple Association)

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