

Fact bite #48



Metal food contact materials

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Metal has been used in food packaging since the early 19th century, following the invention of the canning process, which allowed both the storage and preservation of food directly in the packaging.

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Metal packaging provides strong barrier properties against gases, light, and odors, and it is able to withstand high temperatures, making it suitable for long-term food storage.

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Direct contact between food and metal can lead to migration of metal ions, especially in foods with high acidity or salt content. To prevent this, both steel and aluminum packaging are often coated with organic polymers, such as plastic. These coatings can themselves contain and release known chemicals of concern such as bisphenol A or related chemicals into food.

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Stainless steel is a metal food contact material commonly used for reusable drinking bottles, storage containers, cutlery, or frying pans. Compared to coated metals, stainless steel is highly inert and does not require any coating.

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Both aluminum and steel packaging can be recycled many times without loss of material properties. Food and beverage cans often achieve high recycling rates, with aluminum cans typically containing around 70% recycled material.

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