

UNDERSTANDING "PROCESSED" FOODS



WHAT IS A PROCESSED FOOD?

"a product that has been modified to improve its safety, extend the shelf life, enhance its quality, and improve its convenience"

examples of processing

freezing
canning
cooking
baking
fermenting
sprouting
dehydrating
milling
preserving
washing
chopping
fortifying



WHY THE BAD RAP?

well-meaning advice gone bad
rules are easy, nuance is hard
means different things to different people

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO PROCESSED FOODS?



makes foods edible and digestible
improves safety of foods
can improve the nutrient-density of foods
makes nutritious foods more convenient to eat
can provide alternatives when fresh food isn't available
less food preparation time means time for other things

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

UPFs can prompt higher calorie intake and weight gain
may increase risk for heart disease and some cancers associated with increased all-cause mortality
research in its infancy; cause-and-effect not established
is it what the food contains, doesn't contain, or both?

ultra-processed foods

Industrial formulations of foods typically with five or more and usually many ingredients. They are designed to be inexpensive, widely distributed, and hyper-palatable.



LEVELS OF FOOD PROCESSING

unprocessed and minimally processed foods

removal of inedible or unwanted parts, drying, crushing, grinding, fractioning, filtering, roasting, boiling, pasteurization, refrigeration, freezing, placing in containers, vacuum packaging, or non-alcoholic fermentation

includes vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, eggs, meat, fish, oats, rice, pasta, flours, legumes, milk, plain yogurt, herbs and spices

accounts for 30% of the calories we eat

processed culinary ingredients

obtained directly from nature by processes such as pressing, refining, grinding, milling, drying

includes oil, butter, lard, salt, honey, sugar, vinegars, starches extracted from plants

accounts for 3% of the calorie we eat

processed foods

contain just two or three ingredients; processed culinary ingredients added to unprocessed foods

includes canned goods (beans, fruits, vegetables, fish), salted nuts, peanut butter, natural cheeses, fresh bread, some yogurts, salted/cured/smoked meats, wine, beer

many of these items are nutritious and make it easier to cook at home

accounts for 10% of the calories we eat

ultra-processed foods

uses several industrial processes with no domestic equivalent

typically high in sugar, fat, and salt, and lack fiber, vitamins, and minerals

includes industrialized breads, pre-prepared meals, reconstituted meats, most cereals/bars/snack foods, desserts, sweetened beverages

accounts for almost 60% of our calories, but needs to be lower

when buying processed foods...

choose foods with minimal ingredients, and be able to recognize those ingredients

minimize refined grains, added sugar, sodium, and trans fats

choose foods that offer valuable nutrients