



Does Processed = bad? **Not Always**

Processed food tends to be viewed in a negative light, but the bad press isn't always deserved. While some processed foods contain items that we should be limiting for better health, some are actually very good choices.



What does processed mean?

According to recent survey, many of us have different views on what processed means. Processing is a huge category that includes everything from washing to canning. Basically anything done to a raw food before it gets to us is considered processing. Washing and bagging spinach leaves, drying lentils and roasting coffee beans are all forms of processing. With the exception of the very small number of us who live on farms that produce a variety of foods year round, we all need some processed foods.



When is processing good?

It isn't always so easy to get enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains into our days. Choosing minimally processed foods in this category can help. Buying frozen vegetables in the winter can help when fresh is harder to find. Dried fruit is often easier to pack for a quick snack than fresh that may need peeling or chopping. Quick-cooking whole grains can make balanced weeknight dinners easier to fit into a busy night. Milling allows us to bake delicious breads with whole grain flour. So, while many of us could use more fresh foods in our day, that doesn't mean we need to eliminate all processed foods.



How to Choose?

Which processed foods we choose makes a big difference in our nutrient balance. Some processed foods are high in sodium making them a less healthful choice than their fresh counterparts. For example, a cup of canned carrots can have over 400% of the sodium found in a cup of fresh carrots. When it comes to choosing processed foods, the nutrition facts panel can help. Sodium and sugar are two to pay attention to as they can be higher in processed foods. Some examples of processed foods that can make good additions to your day include peanut butter, dried or canned beans, whole grain crackers, hummus and yogurt.

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RESOURCES:

1. 2017 Food and Health Survey: "A Healthy Perspective: Understanding American Food Values" May 2017. <http://www.foodinsight.org/2017-food-and-health-survey>.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 - 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.

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