



Processed Food: What is OK and what you should AVOID



Whole (real) food are natural foods grown in the ground, minimally processed, usually do not have ingredient list and spoil fast. These include:

- Fresh Fruit & Vegetables
- 100% Whole Grains
- Nuts and Seeds

Processed foods are food which are not in their original state. They usually are packaged, boxed or canned and have ingredient lists.

- Fortified food (food with added nutrients)
- Heavily processed food (large amounts of hidden sodium, fats, and sugar)

"The term *processed* food includes *any food* that has been purposely changed in some way prior to consumption. It includes food that has been cooked, canned, frozen, packaged or changed in nutritional composition with fortifying, preserving or preparing in different ways.
Any time we cook, bake or prepare food, we're processing food."

Torey Armul, MS, RD, CSSD, LDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

The Continuum of Processed Foods

Categories	Example	Explanation
Minimally processed food	Bagged carrots, chopped lettuce, raw nuts	These foods are often simply pre-prepped in their original form for convenience.
Frozen and canned food	Frozen fruits and vegetables, canned fruits, vegetables, soup, beans	Fruits and vegetables are often picked at their peak and frozen to lock in nutritional quality and freshness.
Food with combined ingredients or added nutrients	Pasta sauce, salad dressing, cake mixes, ketchup, yogurt, breakfast cereal	Foods with added ingredients for flavor or texture or food with added nutrients. Food are no longer in their original form.
Ready-to-eat foods	Crackers, granola, deli meat	Simple ready-to-eat food, are usually heavily processed.
Pre-made meals	Frozen and microwave meals, instant noodles	The most heavily processed food with added sugars, sodium and fats.



Nutrition facts:

- **Reduced fat or fat-free** products often have hidden added sugars. Added sugars often are used to improve taste and consistency in low fat products.
- **Sugar-free** does not mean a product is calorie-free or has fewer calories. These products often contain sugar alcohols, which are lower in calorie but with added fats. (Starting July 2018, added sugars will be included on the Nutrition Facts Label.)
- **0g trans-fat.** The food might still contain less than 0.5g of trans fat per serving. Try to avoid words in the ingredient list such as hydrogenated oils and shortening.
- **Cholesterol free** doesn't mean, literally, no cholesterol. Cholesterol-free products contain less than 2 mg per serving. Cholesterol is only found in animal products like meat, dairy, eggs, butter, etc. Plant-based products are cholesterol-free.
- Studies suggest some **frozen fruits and vegetables** have just as many nutrients as their fresh counterparts.
- Some vegetables with high amounts of fat-soluble nutrients (vitamins A,D,E,K) such as carrots, leafy greens, and broccoli are able to **protect nutrients** longer in frozen state.
- Foods with high amounts of water-soluble vitamins (B and C) are **best fresh** such as bell peppers, citrus fruits, cabbage, and berries.
- **Fortified food:** Addition of key nutrients such as fiber, vitamins, iron, folic acid, iodine etc. to increase nutritional content (but also look for hidden sugar, sodium and fat).

While some processed foods should be consumed with caution, many actually have a place in a balanced diet. **Balance is key!**

Traffic light for food selection:

Green-Light food: GO!	Yellow-Light Food: Moderation	Red-Light Food: AVOID!
100% whole wheat/ whole grain product	Multigrain or made with whole grain*	White bread
Fresh fruits/vegetables	Dried Fruits	Instant noodles
Frozen fruits/vegetables	Canned fruit and vegetables	Microwave meal
Bagged/cut fruits and vegetables	Canned food (tuna, beans, soup)	Frozen meal
Raw nuts	Flavored, salted nuts	Deli meat
Fortified products (milk, breakfast cereals – look for at least 5 g of fiber per serving)	Stored-bought cookies, yogurt, cheese, crackers, granola (look for at least 2 g of fiber and less than 10 g of sugar per serving)	Partially hydrogenated oils, high-fructose corn syrup, or artificial colorings (pie crust, pudding, popcorn etc)

* There is no guarantee that multigrain bread is made with 100% whole grains or it's free of refined grains. Multigrain may have been processed to remove their bran and germ, which strips them of nutritional value (including fiber and important nutrients).

Take home message:

- Do not assume, always **check and compare** food labels.
- **Avoid** added sugars, fats, sodium and hydrogenated oil in the ingredient list.
- It is **OK** to consume processed (frozen, packaged, fortified) food as some of them have a place in a balanced diet. **Balance** is the key!

Sources:

1. <http://www.eatright.org/resource/food/nutrition/nutrition-facts-and-food-labels/avoiding-processed-foods>
2. <http://www.foodandnutrition.org>
3. <http://projectthehealthychildren.org/why-food-fortification>

No Trans Fatty Acids

Nutrition Facts		Amount/Serving	%DV*	Amount/Serving	%DV**
Total Fat		8g	12%	Cholest.	0mg 0%
Sat. Fat		1g	6%	Sodium	110mg 6%
Polyunsat. Fat		2g		Total Carb.	0g 0%
Monounsat. Fat		4g		Protein	0g
Calories		70		Vitamin A	10%
Fat Cal.		70		Vitamin E	20%

* Percent Daily Values (DV) are based on a diet of 2,000 calories a day.
 ** Not a significant source of dietary fiber, sugars, vitamin C, calcium and iron.

Ingredients: ~~Enriched~~ Enriched Flour, Water, Plant Sterol Ester, Partially Hydrogenated Soybean Oil, Salt, Emulsifiers (Vegetable Mono- and Diglycerides, Soy Lecithin), Polyglycerol Esters of Fatty Acids, Hydrogenated