

Clean Eating



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How and Why to Cut Out
Processed Food
(...for Busy People)

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Introduction - What is "Processed" Food?



You have probably heard about the dangers of processed food. Everyone is telling you to eat more vegetables and fruits, and avoid "manufactured foods". But what exactly is processed food? Just about anyone can look at a chicken nugget and realize that whatever chicken might be present has gone through an extreme alteration.

Some foods which qualify for the definition of processed are actually improved. Some milk, juices and other beverages have vitamins added to them to make them healthier. But for the most part, processed foods should be avoided. Because a lot of the process that gets them from nature to your table includes packing them with preservatives, sugar and trans fats.

By definition, processed food is food that has been altered from its natural state. So a package of chopped lettuce is actually processed. It has been made more convenient, and then bagged. Those types of processed foods are usually good for you. The types of manufactured foods you want to avoid are those that involve combining raw ingredients and chemicals into food-like items.

Pesticides can also be a part of the process. When foods are being grown, they are often treated with chemicals to ward off hungry bugs and insects. That is why eating clean or organic foods can cut down on

the amount of toxins a human being consumes every day by as much as 80%, according to the Environmental Working Group.

When ingredients such as sugar, fat and salt are added to food to enhance flavor or make it last longer, this type of processed product can end up getting more than the recommended amounts of those items into your body. Health hazards and addictions to salt and sugar are often the result.

Those types of items are also usually higher in calories, which means packing on the pounds. And if you eat a lot of red meat that has been processed, you run a much higher risk of contracting certain forms of cancer. So you want to avoid products that have lost nutrients and gained unhealthy and unneeded chemicals and alternatives.

Just how can you spot which food is good for you and which is unhealthy? You need to learn how to

spot "clean" foods, which we cover in our next section.

How to Identify "Clean" Foods

You may have heard people talk about eating a "clean" diet. While there is no specific definition for clean foods, eating clean means sticking with foods that are as close as possible to their natural state. You want to avoid preservatives, coloring and man-made chemicals.

Drinking lots of water aids a clean diet by keeping your system flushed. And for the most part you want to target fruits, vegetables, whole foods (items that have been processed or refined as little as possible and are free from additives or other artificial substances) and a plant-based diet.



But exactly how do you identify clean foods?

When reading food labels, which you should be doing all the time, you want to avoid most foods with more than 5 ingredients.

One-ingredient foods, such as apples, oranges and other fruit in their natural state, are examples of clean foods. And you definitely want to avoid the big 3 added ingredients which cause the most havoc to your health - salt, sugar and dietary fats.



Another tip is to turn away from products that are "made with whole grains". Instead, go for 100% whole-grain products. Refined grains such as bread, cereal and pasta which are made from white flour should also be avoided. But whole-grain pasta, cereal and bread are considered clean foods.

Generally speaking, if a food item has just one ingredient or is as close to its natural state as possible, it qualifies for clean eating. This means no more cans of soup or candy bars, fried chicken and

french fries. Fresh poultry, seafood and meat are usually fine, as long as you take it easy on the creams or sauces.

Follow these tips for spotting clean foods:

1. If there are more than 5 ingredients, look for an alternative.
2. If the food you are thinking about purchasing is in a package, it has been processed to some point.
3. If you read a food label and there are ingredients with names that you cannot pronounce, put it back on the shelf.
4. Most foods with organic labels are cleaner than other options.

5. Avoid trans fats, monosodium glutamate (MSG), high fructose corn syrup, other sugars, sodium and other salts, and white flour.

6. If you see the following ingredients, you are looking at extremely processed foods – corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, cane sugar, sodium, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil.

7. And if you purchase any of the following Dirty Dozen foods, choose organic whenever you can, and wash thoroughly before eating. (The Dirty Dozen foods are so named by the Environmental Working Group because they are extremely high in man-made chemicals and pesticides. When grown in the traditional manner, these 12 foods tested positive for anywhere from 47 to 67 different chemicals.)

- Apples
- Sweet bell peppers

- Cherries
- Imported grapes
- Celery
- Strawberries
- Domestic blueberries
- Nectarines
- Kale, spinach and collard greens
- Potatoes
- Lettuce
- Peaches

Now that you know how to spot clean foods, let's take a look at the best reasons for steering clear of processed foods.

8 Reasons to Cut Out Processed Foods

You know that a diet rich in fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains is healthy for you. But do you know exactly why you should be cutting processed foods

out of your life? Let's take a look at the top 8 reasons for steering clear of processed foods.

Many of them include monosodium glutamate

MSG, or monosodium glutamate, is a form of salt which has been chemically changed to enhance the flavor of many popular processed foods. It has been directly linked to weight gain and obesity, and negatively affects how full you feel when you are eating. This can lead to binge eating, since your brain never knows when you are full.

Liver inflammation, kidney failure and even brain damage are possible byproducts of heavy exposure to MSG. Unfortunately, it is the world's most popular flavor enhancer. And it can be listed under any of the following names – acid hydrolyzed vegetable protein, hydrolyzed corn, MSG, plant protein extract and yeast extract, among others.

They can be full of high fructose corn syrup

Why is high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) so dangerous to your health? Because it contributes to liver deterioration, plaque build up in your blood vessels, has been shown to cause diabetes, it accelerates the natural aging process in your body and can contain unhealthy mercury poisons. And it is used in more and more processed food products all the time.



Low-fat often means high in sugar

Many processed and manufactured foods boast about being low-fat or no-fat in nature. The process which pulls fat out of those foods also involves adding HFCS, sucrose, lactose and glucose, as well as other yummy tasting but unhealthy sweeteners.

Sugar triggers the "feel good" transmitters in your brain, and this can cause an addiction to sweet tasting processed foods. Sugar can have a devastating effect on your health, and is believed by many doctors and nutritionists to be the leading cause of chronic disease and obesity in today's modern societies.

Important nutrients are processed out

Many processed foods are created to last longer on the shelf, and taste better than when they existed in their natural state. This often times involves

removing wonderful phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals, either intentionally or indirectly.

By its very definition, processing foods leads to a non-natural state. So many of the healthy components that nature packs into its foods are lacking when that food is processed.

Unnatural and dangerous chemicals are added

We just mentioned that food manufacturers are usually only interested in creating products that last as long as possible, are inexpensive to make, and taste great so you continue to buy them. How do they do this? In laboratories they find chemicals like fructose that trigger an addictive response in your brain.

They then inject those chemicals into foods during the manufacturing and packaging processes. This unneeded MSG, sugar, salt and a long list of man-

made chemicals finds its way into processed food, which is unhealthy at best and dangerous at worst.

Clean foods are easier on your digestive system

We just discussed how cheap, flavor enhancing, unhealthy chemicals get into your processed food. Your body identifies these as poisons and toxins, and works very hard to rid your system of them. But they are much harder to digest than the foods which nature intended men and women to eat. This makes your digestive tract work harder than it has to, and this can lead to a long list of gastrointestinal problems and health issues.

Whole foods are less expensive than their processed counterparts

Junkfood addicts often claim that eating healthy foods is just too expensive. But several studies like one published by the Rodale Institute show that the

opposite is actually true. For instance, they show that one serving of 100% organic chili (made with fresh ingredients) costs roughly \$0.50 less than a can of microwavable chili like you would purchase at the grocery store.

You will begin to feel healthier almost immediately

Processed foods contain a lot of junk your body does not need. This can include phosphates which actually weaken your bones and organs. The excess sugar in processed foods can lead to weight gain and heart problems, and many manufactured foods can lead to chronic inflammation, dementia, respiratory failure and multiple neurologic problems. When you eat clean and avoid processed food, you become healthier.



Processed Food Alternatives for Super Busy People

You might be thinking that you won't have the time to purchase and prepare whole foods and healthy fruits, vegetables and grains. After all, your life is very busy already. But you can benefit from a plant-based and clean eating diet without making your lifestyle more hectic than it already is. Just follow these processed food alternative tips for eating clean and smart, and you may actually find that your

healthier eating habits save you more time and energy than your processed food past.

Make a game plan

Forming a game plan centered around healthy eating is essential if you are going to avoid processed foods and the dangers they can deliver. Sit down and create a realistic shopping, cooking and food storage plan that includes the following 4 tips.

Clean out your pantry

Check the labels on all of the food you currently have in your home. Pull out everything that lists MSG, HFCS, added sugar, excess salt and white flour. If you feel that throwing away this food is a waste of money, donate it to your local homeless shelter. But you are definitely going to have to rid your home of addictive and unhealthy processed food temptations to begin the clean eating process.



Prepare and cook multiple meals at once

Batch cooking makes sense for a lot of reasons. When you purchase, prepare and then cook multiple meals at once, you can often times benefit from lower prices by buying larger quantities. Whatever mess you make in the kitchen only has to be dealt with at one time. And by packaging, preparing, cooking and storing several meals at a time rather than single meals several times a week, you minimize your time investment.

Get the whole family involved

You are busy. So is everyone else in your family. So why not schedule a couple of hours every week so the entire family can help out in your shopping, preparing and batch cooking processes? Not only will this save time and money in the long run, but it will also instill important and healthy eating habits in your children.

Take a road trip

Do some research and find out where the whole food markets, bazaars and shops are in your area. You may be surprised to find that natural, locally grown foods free of pesticides, fertilizers and chemicals are just around the corner, and less expensive than the ones you have been buying in the supermarket.



Avoiding processed foods when eating out

Once you begin to avoid processed food, you will find yourself eating out less frequently. But there are always going to be times when seasonal holidays, birthday celebrations and get-togethers with family and friends make it tough for you to eat in a healthy manner.

However, there are some steps you can take which will help you avoid processed food any time you eat away from your home. For instance, avoid processed salad dressings and choose oil and vinegar instead



the next time you join your friends for dinner, either in their home or restaurant.

Choose grilled over fried as an option whenever possible. Food items which are processed and prepackaged may be fried in oil that contains trans fats. And when eating at a restaurant, don't be afraid to ask your chef or waiter how certain meals are prepared.

Another great way of avoiding processed foods when you eat out is to take advantage of the growing

movement towards healthy dining options. Many restaurant menus contain gluten-free, heart-healthy and non-processed sections, making avoiding processed foods easy. Sometimes these are not printed. But all you have to do is ask and you might get a meal prepared in a healthier way.

You might want to skip dessert as well. Desserts are notoriously high in sugar and other processed additives which serve no other reason than to preserve them longer and get you hooked on their taste.

One of the best ways to keep from eating unhealthy manufactured foods when attending a party or gathering is to bring your own dish. And whether at a friend's house or restaurant, skip flavored beverages and stick with water.

You can also eat a small portion of something healthy and filling before you head out, so you limit the number of processed calories you consume. Now

let's take a look at some yummy dishes you can make at home that beat their processed counterparts in flavor and health.

7 Healthy Homemade Alternatives to Common Processed Foods

Make these flavorful foods at home and you can save money while eating healthy and responsibly.

Tomato based products - When you make your own pasta sauce, ketchup and salsa, you dictate exactly what healthy ingredients you are using. When you purchase these tomato-based items at a grocery store, they have likely gone through an extreme manufacturing process.

Sauces and dressings - We mentioned in the last section about eating out how you can choose healthy oil and vinegar as a salad dressing over processed options. There are also dozens, if not hundreds, of

great tasting dressings and sauces you can make right at home, using healthy ingredients. This also means never purchasing expensive processed sauces or dressings again.



Granola and energy bars - There are multiple healthy recipes online for making your own granola bars. The same goes for energy boosting bars, which you can make for up to 50% less money than purchasing the unhealthy processed options at your supermarket.

Guacamole - This is another "made at home" processed food alternative which is not only healthier when you create it in your own kitchen, but also less expensive than the store-bought variety.

Yogurt - Do-it-yourself yogurt is so much healthier than the products offered at your favorite supermarket. Some yogurt can be healthy off-the-shelf, but most of it is extremely processed.

Soup - Store-bought soup is notoriously high in sodium. If you are crunched for time, you can slow cook several servings of healthy, tasty, homemade soup in a slow cooker and freeze for instant enjoyment later.



Bread - You can purchase a versatile bread machine, or simply make healthy and incredible tasting bread varieties in cooking tins in your oven. The list of healthy ingredients you can incorporate into homemade bread, like whole grains and fruits, is virtually endless. Ezekiel bread is good alternative to regular breads as it is made of sprouted grains. There are many flavors to choose from



How to Deal With Cravings for Processed Foods

One of the best ways to deal with an addiction is to remove a physical presence. We spoke earlier about cleaning out your pantry, and removing processed foods from your living environment. After all, if a

sugar-filled snack or processed microwave meal is not available, you can't eat it.

But sometimes you may experience cravings for processed foods when you are away from home. A great way to kill those desires is to keep healthy and delicious tasting fruits, vegetables, homemade granola bars and other unprocessed snacks in your car and workplace.

Studies have shown that drinking 8 to 16 ounces of water can fight a food craving for more than an hour. Also, if you eat 5 or 6 meals throughout the day your stomach constantly stays full. This means less of a chance that you will give in to the urges created by a processed food that is calling your name.



Keeping a food journal is also helpful here.

Whenever you experience a craving for unhealthy, processed food, write down your feelings. Then look at what happened just before the craving hit. Did you receive an exceptionally good or bad piece of news? Emotional eating is not in response to true hunger, and is often attached to a sugar addiction which can be a problem with processed foods.

Surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals is extremely important. If you have someone you can talk to that is also trying to steer clear of the dangers of processed foods, your chances of eating smart and never giving into unhealthy cravings are much higher.

You should also keep a "Why?" belief statement on you at all times. This can be simply a small card that fits in your wallet, pocket or purse. Write down the reasons why you are avoiding processed foods and

trying to eat a much healthier diet. This can provide the motivation to beat even the strongest cravings.

Pump Some Iron

Strength training in general has gained much popularity in recent years as researches show superior general health benefits to the sport, and more specifically for women, because it has the uncanny ability to rebuild bone mass density and regulate hormonal imbalances and slow down the aging process.

Some of the scientifically proven benefits of strength training include:

- Boosts metabolism
- Regulates hormonal imbalances
- Builds bone density mass (prevents or reverse osteoporosis)
- Reduces risk of diabetes, heart disease, arthritis
- Improves cholesterol, blood pressure, glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity

As you see your body get more toned and sculpted,
you will get excited about making better choices in
what you eat and what you do.

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