

Not all processing is bad, but some “processed foods” are known to be very bad for our health
What is going on?

The problems with “processed” food are mainly because of **too much REFINING**, and harmful **CHEMICAL CHANGE**, or because the food isn’t actually any good, but packed with **sugar, salt and fat** to make us like it anyway

Made in a Factory

We are all very grateful to have foods that have been prepared by someone else. Some factory-made foods are good for our health like tinned beans, and chopped tomatoes. The problem is that once the food is made into ‘a thing’ that we buy, we may well not notice what has gone into it. The packaging will be designed to make you think this food is fantastic, fun, or healthy, even if it isn’t. Food manufacturers want to keep costs down and they know that

human beings will eat anything at all that has salt, sugar and fat in it.

By adding these three things to ANYTHING and EVERYTHING, along with specially engineered flavourings, and by making foods feel crunchy or nice in the mouth, food manufacturers can get us to eat foods that are basically **C.R.A.P (Calorie-Rich And Processed)**. Many manufactured foods are **designed to be addictive**, especially those that are salty, fatty and sugary (eg, hob-nobs, icecream, doughnuts). Even without sugar, fatty salty foods like crisps and pizza have a similar addictive effect.

Processed ingredients to avoid:

Meat - processed meats are known to definitely cause cancer.

This includes Bacon, Sausages, Salami, Pepperoni, Hot Dogs, Corned Beef, Ham etc.

Sugar (any colour!) including Fructose, Agave syrup

One the other hand ...

Fresh berries and fruits are healthy foods that naturally contain sugar.

There are two ways fruits get processed which can cause problems. The first is **drying** (eg raisins). This causes a problem because it is very easy to over-eat **dried fruit**. The second is when they are turned into as **juices and smoothies**. These will give you a sugar rush, unless you go very slow!

White (wheat) flour

This is the main ingredient in baked goods - **pasta, breads, doughnuts, cakes, biscuits and pastries**.

A lot of **‘brown bread’** is made with white flour, plus some bits and colouring, to give the impression it is better than it is. Unless it is “wholemeal”, cut down or avoid.

White Rice

Vegetable Oils, including Coconut and Palm Oils.

The problem here for most people is that oils are incredibly rich in calories, and many oils do not have an ideal range of different substances within them in terms of health

Extra virgin olive oil, and cold-pressed rape-seed are probably the exception here.

From Good, to worse: what happens to grains

Healthiest grains are any **actual whole grains** like brown rice, millet, buckwheat, corn, oat groats.

Nearly as good are **part-processed grains** like bulgur wheat, oat-meal, porridge oats and polenta.

Not as good, but still better than white flour, are foods made with **whole-grain/whole-meal flours**.

So, whole-meal pasta is better than normal white pasta. Pasta is best eaten ‘al-dente’ = still a little chewy. The problem caused by grinding whole grains into flour are mainly to do with the energy getting released into the blood stream too fast. **Stone-ground flours** are better for this because the grains aren’t smashed into such tiny bits.

Processes that we can do at home too, that still aren't so good ...

Frying and Charring

When foods are fried or deep fried a number of unpleasant chemicals are created which are very damaging to the body (they cause inflammation and promote cancer). The less of these we eat the better. If there is a way of preparing a food without frying, then it might be worth a go.

A lot of manufactured foods contain these heat-damaged oils.

Charring - any cooking process that makes the food blackened or really browned - also tends to form unpleasant and damaging chemical compounds.

Obviously we can cope well with a certain amount of this particularly if we are eating plenty of fresh whole plant foods, but on the whole it is something to reduce.

Throwing out the best bits!

Do those potatoes really need peeling? Could those root veg just do with a wash and scrub instead? Why not just wash that apple instead of peeling it? Obviously not all peel and skin is edible, but a lot is.

A lot of the things that plants make to protect themselves from harm are the brightly coloured, strongly flavoured compounds that are very good for our health. And are often found mostly in the SKIN of the fruit and veg.

Smoothies and Juices

These release sugar into the blood stream very quickly because if we ate these fruit and veg whole it would take longer, and they wouldn't be broken into such tiny bits before we swallow them.

Good Processes

Chopping, grating and slicing veg

Pro-biotics for free!

The healthy bugs that are used to make trendy things like sauerkraut and kimchi, and which help balance your microbiome (gut bugs), are found naturally on the surface of vegetables and fruits. They are killed by cooking. Before you cook something you can ask yourself if instead it could be chopped small, grated or finely sliced and eaten that way?

A word of caution though, this chopping, slicing and grating is best done at home ... 'why' is a long story, so let's just say, definitely best done at home!

Cooking

Whilst many foods we often cook could be eaten raw, some foods just definitely need cooking. Mushrooms for example. Potatoes are another. Cooked tomatoes are better in some ways than raw.

Fermentation

On the whole this makes foods more nutritious and easier to digest. Examples include yoghurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi.

If you buy these fermented foods, (and this isn't something you HAVE to do at all) make sure that

- 1) They are 'live' and
- 2) They aren't full of added sugar

The books 'Wild Fermentation' and 'Cultured Club' show you how to do it for yourself, though it is worth knowing that most ferments become something like a pet - they do need regular attention and feeding!

Shelling Nuts

Nuts are healthy foods, full of healthy fats/oils, vitamins, protein and CALORIES. So as most of us need to weigh a little less rather than more, they are also easy to over-eat. A handful a day is enough. One way to slow down your nut eating is to shell them. This takes time and effort. You will probably want a rest by the time you've cracked open a handful!