



BC DINING
FEED YOUR MIND.

Nutrition Tip

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Please share this with staff, and let us know if there is something specific you want to learn about in an upcoming tip.

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Processed Food: What It Is and What It Isn't

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What does yogurt, deli meat, and hummus all have in common? You guessed it - they're all processed!

What It Is

Processed food is any raw food that has been modified during preparation. Procedures vary widely and include any process from washing, cleaning and cutting to cooking, canning, and freezing. The food may be refined or have additives like nutrients, preservatives, and flavors. According to these standards created by the US Food and Drug Association, the majority of foods found in the grocery store are considered processed.

Processing is not only used to extend the shelf life or enhance the taste of products but is necessary to eliminate harmful bacteria and make some foods suitable for use. For example, milk must be pasteurized to be considered safe for consumption and olives are pressed to extract your favorite cooking oil! Alterations can reduce nutrient levels or increase salt, sugar, and fat content. Many procedures do not change the nutritional value of foods at all while others can make food even more nutrient-dense. Freezing vegetables simply makes them last longer and fortifying almond milk with calcium supports bone health.

What It Is Not

Not all processed food is the same. There are varying degrees of processing. Minimally processed maintains the natural edible parts of plants and animals. Moderately processed foods have added salt, sugar, or fat. Examples include canned fruit, nut butter, and pasta.

Ultra-processed foods or "highly processed" go beyond moderate processing to incorporate artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives. These are ready-to-eat meals, breakfast cereals, and snack foods like potato chips.

It is not an entire group of foods to eliminate. Rule #1 of balanced eating is giving yourself full permission to eat all foods. It is both unnecessary and practically impossible to avoid processed food. Remember that there are important steps in food production to ensure that it is clean, edible, and stays fresh (let's reduce food waste!). It can also make our food really tasty and convenient to prepare. Who doesn't love warm Betty Crocker brownies in 25 minutes? Try to emphasize foods closest to their original form and eat what makes your body feel good. **In the end, your diet is your choice!**

