



Understanding Processed Foods

There is a lot of discussion nowadays about processed food. However, many people don't really know what "processed" means. There are different types of processed foods and it is important to know the differences to help make better decisions about what to include in your eating pattern. They range from least processed to most heavily processed.

Minimally Processed—Pre-prepped foods such as veggies cut and bagged or nuts that have been roasted

Peak Processing—foods that are preserved at the peak of freshness to keep nutritional value such as fruits and vegetables that are frozen or canned; Be sure to check the nutrition facts label to make sure there are no added ingredients

Flavor and Texture Processing—Ingredients (preservatives, sweeteners, spices, and colors) are added to try and enhance a food's flavor and texture; This kind of processing is usually found in salad dressings, some yogurts, boxed cake mixes, and jars of pasta sauce

Ready to eat Processing—This is a very common form of processing and is considered heavily processed; some examples are crackers, chips, cookies, deli meat, and boxed pantry dinners

Processed Pre-made meals—These are considered the most heavily processed foods. They include foods like microwavable dinners and frozen snacks and meals (like corn dogs, pre made wings, pizzas, pot pies, and chicken nuggets)



The goal is to consume closer to fresh or the minimal side of processing. Making heavily processed foods a part of your regular eating pattern may lead to a number of chronic diseases, because the human body thrives best on wholesome foods. Choosing fresh options for all your food groups based on MyPlate recommendations is the safest approach to a healthy eating pattern.

The Positives and Negatives of Processed Foods

Some foods are processed to increase their nutrient content. For example, milk and some juices are fortified with vitamin D calcium and some cereals contain added fiber. When fresh fruit is unavailable, fruit that is packed in its own juice can be a great alternative. Minimally processed pre cut vegetables and salads may help people who may not have much free time to get enough in their eating pattern.

On the reverse side, heavily processed foods may contain an excess of sugars, fats, and sodium that our bodies don't need.

Although not always the case, words like "natural" and "organic" may serve as a distraction for sugars written as natural cane sugar or other forms of sugar like honey — do not be fooled, it is still sugar!

Added fats help extend the shelf life of many foods but will increase the amount of bad cholesterol in our bodies. Look out for danger words like hydrogenated oils in the ingredient list and keep the cholesterol and saturated fat per serving under 20% of your daily value. Aim for 5% or lower.

Majority of the average American's sodium intake comes from processed foods. Rinsing canned products when possible can help reduce the amount of sodium by almost half.

Processed food can be helpful, but only when the right kinds are chosen. Choosing heavily processed foods may seem convenient and satisfying at the time but the consequences can be deadly in the long run. Keep the processing minimal and always read the nutrition facts label. The fewer added ingredients you see the better it will be for your health.

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- Recipe: California Avocado Summer Wrap

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California Avocado Super Summer Wrap



- 1 ripe avocado (seeded, peeled, and cut into chunks)
- 1/2 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 1/2 cup blueberries
- 1/2 cup carrots (grated)
- 1/4 cup red onion (chopped)
- 2 cups fresh arugula (chopped)
- 12 ounces cooked chicken breast (cubed)
- 4 8" whole wheat tortillas

Directions

1. Mash half the avocado chunks with yogurt and lime juice in a medium bowl.
2. Add remaining filling ingredients, including the rest of the avocado chunks; mix gently.
3. Top each tortilla with 1/4 of filling mixture.
4. Roll tuck in ends. Slice in half diagonally, securing with toothpicks, if needed.

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Prep time: 15 minutes

Makes: 4 Servings

Nutrition Information

Key Nutrients	Amount	% Daily Value*
Total Calories	389	
Total Fat	13 g	20%
Protein	35 g	
Carbohydrates	32 g	11%
Dietary Fiber	7 g	28%
Saturated Fat	3 g	15%
Sodium	370 mg	15%

MyPlate:

- 1/4 cup Fruits
- 3/4 cup Vegetables
- 2 ounces Grains
- 3 ounces Protein
- 1/4 cup Dairy



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