

# Understanding Processed Foods



## WHAT IS A PROCESSED FOOD?

*"A product that has been modified to improve its safety, extend the shelf life, enhance its quality and improve its convenience"*

### Examples of processing:

freezing  
canning  
cooking  
baking  
fermenting  
sprouting  
dehydrating  
milling  
preserving  
washing  
chopping  
fortifying



## WHY THE BAD RAP?

- Lack of standardized definitions
- Misconception that processed = unhealthy
- Nuance gets lost in media and marketing



## ARE THERE BENEFITS TO PROCESSED FOODS?

- Makes foods edible and digestible
- Improves safety of foods
- Can improve the nutrient-density of foods
- Makes nutrient-dense foods more convenient to eat
- Can provide alternatives when fresh food isn't available
- Less food preparation time means time for other things



## WHAT ABOUT ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS (UPFs)?

- UPFs are formulations of ingredients, not typically used in home kitchens, that result from a series of industrial processes. They are designed to be low cost, shelf-stable, ready-to-eat and hyper-palatable.
- UPF consumption is associated with weight gain, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression and all-cause mortality.
- The cause-and-effect between UPFs and health outcomes is not established - Is it what the food contains, doesn't contain, or both?

# LEVELS OF FOOD PROCESSING

## Unprocessed and minimally processed foods

- Removal of inedible or unwanted parts, drying, crushing, grinding, fractioning, filtering, roasting, boiling, pasteurization, refrigeration, freezing, placing in containers, vacuum packaging or non- alcoholic fermentation
- Includes vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, eggs, meat, fish, oats, rice, pasta, flours, legumes, milk, plain yogurt, herbs and spices
- Accounts for 30% of the calories we eat

## Processed culinary ingredients

- Obtained directly from nature by processes such as pressing, refining, grinding, milling, drying
- Includes oil, butter, lard, salt, honey, sugar, vinegars, starches extracted from plants
- Accounts for 3% of the calorie we eat

## Processed foods

- Contain just two or three ingredients; processed culinary ingredients added to unprocessed foods
- Includes canned goods (beans, fruits, vegetables, fish), salted nuts, peanut butter, natural cheeses, fresh bread, some yogurts, salted/cured/smoked meats
- Many of these items are nutritious and make it easier to cook at home
- Accounts for 10% of the calories we eat

## Ultra-processed foods

- Uses several industrial processes with no domestic equivalent
- Typically high in sugar, fat, and salt, and lack fiber, vitamins and minerals
- Includes industrialized breads, pre-prepared meals, reconstituted meats, most cereals/bars/snack foods, desserts, sweetened beverages
- Accounts for almost 60% of our calories, but needs to be lower

## When buying processed foods...

Choose foods with minimal ingredients that you can generally recognize.

Minimize refined grains, added sugar, added sodium and trans fats.

Choose foods that offer valuable nutrients.

Use an app such as Fooducate, Yuka or Sift Food Labels.