

A monthly wellness newsletter from Better You

## Eat smarter: Know the facts about processed foods

Navigating the world of processed foods can be overwhelming, but the good news is not all processed foods are created equal. Some can be a healthy choice, while others should be limited or avoided. Let's break it down.

### The 4 levels of processed foods

- 1. Minimally processed:** These foods are the healthiest choice. They're washed, cleaned, chopped, or cooked, but still retain their original nutrients and flavor. Think fresh fruits and vegetables, canned beans and tomatoes, frozen vegetables and fruits.
- 2. Moderately processed:** These foods are changed from their original state, but still contain some original nutrients and flavor. Examples include packaged grains like rice and cereal made with whole grains, canned tuna and salmon, yogurt with live cultures. These are also healthy choices.
- 3. Highly processed:** These foods are significantly altered with added sugars, salt, and unhealthy fats. Limit foods like packaged snack foods, sugary cereals, energy bars, and frozen meals.



- 4. Ultra-processed:** These foods are highly processed with artificial additives, preservatives, and coloring agents. Avoid foods like frozen pizzas and microwaveable meals, sugary drinks, candy, and sweets.

### Tips for making informed choices

- **Read labels:** Check the ingredient list and nutrition label for whole ingredients, low added sugars, salt, and unhealthy fats. The healthier foods have ingredients you recognize and can be found in a home kitchen.
- **Choose whole foods:** Prioritize whole, unprocessed foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins like eggs, chicken, and white fish,

and healthy fats such as olive oil, nuts, and avocado.

- **Mind portion sizes:** Even healthy processed foods can be unhealthy in excess.
- **Cook at home:** Control the ingredients and portion sizes of your meals by cooking at home.

By understanding the levels of processed foods and making informed choices, you can maintain a healthy, balanced diet. Remember, processed foods can be convenient and affordable, but it's important to choose wisely.

### Want to learn more?

Click [here](#) to register for Ask the Dietitian: Let's Talk about Processed Foods on June 11, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. ET.

Resource: [Eatright.org](https://www.eatright.org)