



What does “processed” mean? When a food is processed, it is somehow changed from its natural state. This might happen through cooking, freezing, or adding chemical substances to the food to keep it from going bad or to change how it tastes. Processing often changes the quality of the food to be more or less nutritious .

The bottom line Read the ingredients lists on packaged foods. Eat foods with fewer ingredients and ingredients you recognize. Focus on a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean protein foods, calcium rich foods, and healthy fats every day.

	Un-Processed Foods				Ultra-Processed Foods
	Fresh	Pantry Staples	Prepared		
			Lightly	Heavily	
What are the different types of foods?	Fresh foods come from plants or animals. They are close to their natural state. They are often washed, ground, chilled or sliced before eating.	Pantry staples include ingredients used to cook or flavor fresh foods. They are usually not eaten alone. They include foods that have been pressed or ground.	Prepared foods are often made from both fresh and pantry staples foods. These foods are processed to make food last longer, or to improve taste. These foods may be canned, cooked, or baked.		Ultra-processed foods have added artificial ingredients that are not used in home cooking like sweeteners or preservatives. These foods are often high in added salt, sugar, unhealthy fats, and refined grains and are low in healthy nutrients.
			Lightly prepared foods are lower in added salt, sugar, and saturated fat.	Heavily prepared foods are high in added salt, sugar, and saturated fat.	
What are some examples of these foods?	Fresh foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, meats, legumes, nuts and seeds, milk, tea, and coffee.	Pantry staples include foods such as oil, butter, sugar, spices, salt, flour, corn starch, baking powder, and vinegar. Some pantry staples such as hot sauce, soy sauce, and bouillon are ultra-processed. Choose un-processed pantry staples whenever possible. Add only a small amount of ultra-processed pantry staples to fresh foods when there is no substitute.	Lightly prepared foods include canned foods, meals and snacks made of grains, meats, fruits, vegetables, beans, and dairy prepared WITH pantry staples and fresh foods that are LOW in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- sodium (200 milligrams or less)- added sugars (5 grams or less)*- saturated fat (less than 1.5 grams) Examples are soups, stir fries, sandwiches, and salads.	Heavily prepared foods include canned foods, meals and snacks made of grains, meats, fruits, vegetables, beans, and dairy prepared WITH pantry staples and fresh foods that are HIGH in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- sodium (more than 200 milligrams)- added sugars (more than 5 grams)**- saturated fat (more than 1.5 grams) Examples are homemade cakes and cookies, fried foods, casseroles, and gravies.	Ultra-processed foods include candy, chips, soft drinks, packaged frozen dinners, and ready to eat meals.
How much should I eat of each type of food?	Eat more fresh foods than any other type. Try to include fresh foods in every snack and meal.	Use pantry staples in small amounts when preparing fresh foods.	Lightly prepared foods can be eaten as often as fresh foods .	Eat fewer of these types of foods compared to fresh and lightly prepared foods.	Eat fewer of these foods than all other types of foods.

*If added sugar is not listed on the nutrition facts label and sugar is not in the first 5 ingredients of the ingredient list, the food is lightly prepared.

**If added sugar is not listed on the nutrition facts label and sugar is in the first 5 ingredients of the ingredient list, the food is heavily prepared.