



Processed VS. Ultra-Processed Foods

There has been so much information put out lately about processed foods, and most of it is meant to spread fear. This handout will dispel the myths surrounding processed foods, describe the difference between processed and ultra-processed, and hopefully provide some reassurance about including processed foods in your diet.



What is a “processed” food?



According to the USDA, any food that has been altered from its original state is considered a processed food.



This includes washing, chopping, freezing, cooking, as well as adding preservatives, fortifying with additional nutrients, and flavors.

Nearly every food consumed is processed in some way, but there are different levels of processing.



Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Levels of Food Processing

There are three basic levels of processing, based on how much a food item is changed from its original state.

Minimally processed:

- ⇒ Foods are changed very little from producer to consumer
- ⇒ Nutritional content does not change
- ⇒ Includes washing, refrigeration, pasteurization, freezing
- ⇒ Examples include fresh fruits & veggies, meats, tea, coffee and milk



Moderately processed:

- ⇒ Foods that have been modified to increase shelf life, or enhance flavor or texture, but still resemble their original state
- ⇒ May have added sugar, salt, fat or preservatives
- ⇒ Includes some canned fruits & veggies, some cheeses, fresh bread, canned fish, flavored yogurt, jarred spaghetti sauce



Ultra-processed (or highly processed):

- ⇒ Foods that have undergone many changes from their original state
- ⇒ May be lower in nutritional value, but not always
- ⇒ Sometimes called convenience foods or junk foods
- ⇒ Examples include ready-to-eat meals, frozen pizzas, candy, microwave meals



Reasons foods may be processed

Convenience/Accessibility:

Not everyone has access to a kitchen or the physical ability to cook, so ready-to-eat foods are an easy way to get nourishment



Preservation:

Some foods have a limited shelf life, so preserving (pickling, canning, freezing, drying) can make those foods last longer



Palatability:

Everyone has different taste and texture preferences, and some are unable to eat specific textures due to dental or medical conditions



Safety:

Pasteurization and cooking are just a few ways that food is made safe to consume

Affordability:

Fresh foods can be expensive, so frozen, canned and dried foods are a great alternative, often at a lower cost



Penne with Tuna & Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Recipe from eatingwell.com

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Makes: 2 servings

Ingredients:

3 oz uncooked wheat pasta
1 tbsp olive oil
3/4 cup thinly sliced leeks
(or scallions)
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 cups fresh spinach
1 2.6-oz pouch white tuna in water,
broken into large chunks
3 tbsp reduced-calorie Italian dressing
2 tbsp dried tomatoes (not oil-
packed), snipped
Cracked black pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Cook pasta according to package directions; drain and return to saucepan.
2. In a 10-inch skillet, heat oil over medium-low. Add leeks and garlic; cook 5-7 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Turn off heat. Add spinach; stir until slightly wilted.
3. Stir spinach mixture into pasta. Stir in tuna, Italian dressing and tomatoes. If desired, sprinkle with cracked black pepper.

Nutrition Facts (per 1.5 cup serving): 356 calories 18g protein 46g carbohydrates
7g fiber 14g fat 406mg sodium

Resources: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/sshw/message/message.php?p=Health&m=1493>

<https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/processed-foods/>

<https://www.eatingwell.com/penne-with-tuna-sun-dried-tomatoes-7161681>

**Consumer-centered access for
long-term care information,
referrals and assessments.
For information,
call 518-382-8481, #9, ext. 304**



Do you have questions or concerns about what to eat?

If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County's Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible for a free consultation with Debbie Griswold, Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269 to contact or leave a message.

Check out our website for nutrition resources: <http://ccschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors>