

Healthy Students = Better Learners

Nutrition Basics for the School Year

The World of Processed Foods

What is a processed food?

This is any food that has been changed in some way before it is eaten. Foods that have been cooked, canned, frozen, packaged, fortified, preserved or prepared in different ways are all examples of processed foods. With this being said, keep in mind that processed foods fall on a scale of minimally processed to highly processed.

Minimally processed food, like bagged spinach, cut vegetables and roasted nuts are simply pre-prepared for convenience.

Highly processed foods, like pre-made meals such as frozen pizza and microwave dinners are convenient, however often have excessive fat, sugar, and salt added.

“So, should I avoid processed foods all together?”

Minimally processed foods have a role in healthy eating.

For example, milk and some juices are fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Canned fruit packed in water is a good alternative when fresh fruit is not available and pre-cut foods like vegetables can provide convenience in meal preparation.

Keep an eye out for heavily processed foods.

These are foods that are not in it's original form, like potato chips. It can also be food that is not naturally occurring such as sodas, donuts, cookies and candy. These foods often have high amounts of added fat, sugar and salt therefore should be consumed less often.



Canada's Food Guide

Recommended servings for 4 to 13-year-olds

- 1 Vegetables and fruit
5-6 servings per day
- 2 Grain products
4-6 servings per day
- 3 Milk and alternatives
2-4 servings per day
- 4 Meat and alternatives
1-2 servings per day



The bottom line is that...

- Highly processed foods should be chosen less often.
- If eating processed foods, keep in mind tips on how to navigate the Nutrition Facts label.
- By planning meals ahead and making foods at home, you can reduce the amount of processed foods you and your family consume!



What does the Nutrition Facts Label really tell me?

These are 4 tips to remember when you are reading a nutrition facts label:

Step 1: Look at the Serving Size

Compare the serving size on the package to the amount that you eat

Step 2: Look at the Percent Daily Value (%DV)

%DV puts nutrients on a scale of 0 to 100. It tells you if you are getting a little or a lot of nutrients in one serving of the food.

→Keep in Mind: 5% is a little, 15% is a lot!

Step 3: Try to get more of these nutrients

Fibre, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Iron, Calcium

Step 4: Try to get less of these nutrients

Fat, Saturated Fat, Trans Fat, Sodium,

Tips to Teach Healthy Habits

- Many of the highly processed foods that are purchased can be made easily at home, with a fraction of the fat, salt and sugar. By making foods at home, you are in control of how much you add, if you choose to add any fat, sugar, or salt at all!
- Take the time to plan meals with your family. This will cut back the times you need to turn to processed convenience foods during the weekday rush!