

# Can Processed Foods Be Good for You?

As Heart Health Month comes to an end, let's talk about processed foods. We often hear that processed foods are bad for us. So, are there any benefits to processed foods?

The USDA defines processed food as one that has undergone any changes to its natural state. This includes:

washing • cleaning • milling • cutting • chopping • heating • pasteurizing • blanching • canning • freezing • drying • mixing • packaging


According to these standards, almost all foods sold in the grocery store are processed to some degree.

## From Fresh to Ultra-Processed

Food can range from unprocessed to ultra-processed.

Unprocessed	Minimally Processed	Processed	Ultra-Processed
Whole apple	Prepackaged apple slices	Unsweetened applesauce	Applesauce sweetened with high fructose corn syrup

Processed foods become a concern the more highly processed they are. Ultra-processed foods can be higher in salt, sugar, and fat and may contain preservatives, flavorings, and other additives to enhance flavor and increase shelf life.

 Most often we want to choose foods that are unprocessed, minimally processed, or processed, and limit ultra-processed foods.

## Benefits of Processing Foods

### **Makes food edible and easier to digest**

Milling grain into flour allows us to use the grain in many different foods.

### **Improves food safety**

Pasteurizing milk destroys harmful bacteria, making it safe to drink.

### **Makes nutritious foods more convenient**

Dried beans like black beans and kidney beans are great sources of fiber and protein, but canned beans offer the same health benefits with quicker preparation.

### **Provides options when fresh food isn't available**

Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables without added sugar or sodium are nutritious options available year-round and can help stretch your food budget.

## Quick Healthy Meal Idea

Processed foods can help you have a nutritious lunch when short on time.

Pair a bagged salad, canned chicken, and whole wheat crackers for a balanced meal that includes:

 Vegetables

 Protein

 Whole grains

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