



## PROCESSING YOUR DIET

BY FINESSA RASSEL, ATC

Nutrition plays a key role in recovery. **Food is fuel for your body.** But, the *type* of food you choose to fuel your body with makes a huge difference in its healing process. You might have heard the terms: “processed” and “ultra-processed” in reference to the food you eat, but what do these actually mean and why should we care? Let’s debrief.



### PROCESSED VS ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

- **Processed foods** are foods changed from their natural state. This includes the processes of heating; freezing; drying; or adding sugars, salts, or even vitamins and minerals. **Not all processed foods are bad for you!**
- However, **Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)** are foods that have been heavily altered physically, chemically, and/or biologically. **These foods are linked to** obesity, heart disease, and cancer.
  - Unfortunately, over **½ of the average American diet** consists of UPFs.
  - Common examples of UPFs include: chips, chicken nuggets, hot dogs, soda, candy, etc.

### HOW TO RECOGNIZE UPFS

It's important to know what you are putting into your body, and the best way to do that is to know what to look for on a food label/ingredient list. Below are some tips and tricks to identify UPFs:

- Any food listing more than 5 ingredients is likely to be ultra-processed.
- If there are ingredients listed you don't recognize, odds are they are preservatives, colorings, or chemicals - AKA ultra-processed.
- Foods with a high fat, sugar, and salt content are likely ultra-processed.
- Foods promoting a really long shelf-life most likely have added preservatives, and are most likely: ultra-processed.

Look out for ingredients such as: “high-fructose corn syrup,” “hydrogenated or interesterified oils,” “artificial flavor,” etc.



### THE GOOD NEWS

Research shows changes in dietary patterns decreases risk of disease!

- Try to limit and substitute UPFs with foods higher in nutritional value, such as fruits and vegetables!
  - **Tip #1:** Try including more dark green leafy vegetables and brightly colored fruits into your diet.
  - **Tip #2:** *Did you know frozen fruits are a great alternative if fresh fruits are not feasible?* They are more cost-effective,



longer lasting, and often retain the most nutrients! Just avoid added sugars!

- **Tip #3:** Skip the drive-through! Cooking at home sets you up for success when reducing the amount of ultra-processed foods you consume. When you cook the meal, you can control the ingredients. Check out [this previous topic](#) for meal ideas!



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