

WHAT WE'RE READING...



August 2013 | foodandnutrition.com | Brittany Chin | Nutrition

Whole Foods vs. Processed Foods: Why Less is Actually Better



In the food industry right now there are a lot of words being thrown around like GMO, organic, natural, fresh or local. But do all of these words really mean better for you? I recently saw a green Diet Coke can and above it the word "organic" in italicized cursive letters. Is this supposed to mean it is better for you than regular Diet Coke? Does it mean that the ingredients in it are less likely to be processed and possibly affect your health? Probably not.

The proof lies in the pudding when it comes to foods that are good for your health. As a Registered Dietitian, I encourage my patients to focus on "whole foods" that are nutrient dense rather than "processed foods" that are energy dense. What is the difference between the two? Well, nutrient dense foods provide nutrients for your body such as fiber, vitamins and minerals with low added sugar and fat, while energy dense foods, or high calorie foods, provide many calories with little value to your body.

A whole food would be considered, ideally, as a food with only one ingredient i.e. corn on the cob, apple, chicken or a cucumber. These foods will assist you in reducing your cholesterol, regulating your blood sugars and reducing risk for diabetes while also assisting you in maintaining your weight. A processed food is any food with more than one ingredient, and food companies typically add additional sugars, preservatives, dyes and "bad" fats such as saturated and trans fats. A perfect example would be a baked potato (one ingredient) compared to instant mashed potatoes. The ingredients list on the Hungry Jack instant mashed potatoes include: POTATO FLAKES (SODIUM BISULFITE, BHA AND CITRIC ACID ADDED TO PROTECT COLOR AND FLAVOR), CONTAINS 2% OR LESS OF: MONOGLYCERIDES, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED COTTONSEED OIL, NATURAL FLAVOR, SODIUM ACID PYROPHOSPHATE, BUTTEROIL. (Note: hydrogenated oil is trans fat, which is directly linked to heart disease and plaque build up.) It makes you wonder, with all of these added ingredients and chemicals and altering of oils, is this a real food?

READ MORE

Here's how to incorporate whole foods into your daily routine:

- Buy seasonal food directly from a local farmer's market or through a CSA

- Shop around the perimeter of the grocery store and avoid the middle aisles

AT THE JUICE BAR

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[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

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Here's how to incorporate whole foods into your daily routine:

- Buy seasonal food directly from a local farmer at a farmer's market or through a CSA
- Shop around the perimeter of the grocery store — that's where all the whole foods are! Avoid the aisles as that is where the processed foods are located. Make a grocery list that takes you around the outside of the store — fruits and vegetables, low-fat meat and low-fat dairy — and includes just 1-2 aisles per trip.

See below for foods to look for at the grocery store, and foods to avoid:

Fruits and Vegetables

Whole foods: fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, frozen vegetables, frozen fruits, unsalted nuts

Processed foods to avoid: fruit or vegetable juices, fruits canned in heavy syrup, fruit snacks/fruit roll ups, veggie or potato chips, salted/seasoned nuts

Meats

Whole foods: fresh lean meats, fresh fish/shellfish, eggs

Processed foods to avoid: bacon, sausage, chicken fingers, fish sticks, hot dogs, deli meats, potted meats and spam

Dairy

Whole foods: low-fat milk (skim or 1%), plain yogurt, low-fat cheese and cottage cheese

Processed foods to avoid: ice cream bars, processed cheese such as Velveeta, sweetened yogurt/parfaits

- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables! Check out choosemyplate.gov for recipe ideas and tips for healthy eating.
- Last but not least, garden! Try growing your own fruits, vegetables and herbs at home. Check out your local cooperative extension for landscape, garden and indoor plant information and find a Master Gardener in your area.

Happy gardening to my fellow gardeners out there and wishes for a healthy summer!

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