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8 Foods That Aren't As Healthy As You Think



The food industry is a juggernaut trillion-dollar industry that spends \$4.6 billion on marketing in the United States. There has been a relative tipping point in our society, with an increasing number of people looking for healthier choices. Because of this healthy cultural shift, the health food industry has grown astronomically over the past few years.

To capitalize on the desire for more natural choices, the food industry has been very cunning with their healthy-looking advertisements and labels. Making conscious, healthy choices when you're buying food can be a daunting task.

I want to give you a crash course in translating food ingredients and labels that are marketed to you as healthy, but are anything but good for your body. It is by no means a list of every unhealthy "health" food, but they are the most common mistakes I see made by patients in my functional medicine practice:

1. Most cooking oils – On the top of my list of unhealthy "health" foods are industrial seed oils. Oils like canola, vegetable, soybean and corn oils are marketed as "heart healthy" oil choices for cooking and baking. These oils are also in just about every boxed food that's marketed as "healthy."

These oils are so ubiquitous because they're often from government-subsidized crops, which make them cheap and plentiful. The problem with these oils is that they are extremely high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs). Too high in these omega-6 fats will cause systemic inflammation in the body, which is an underlying commonality with almost all chronic degenerative diseases, including heart disease and diabetes.

The solution: Opt for cooking with coconut oil or ghee and using oils like extra-virgin olive oil and avocado oil for room temperature purposes like dressings.

2. Store-bought roasted nuts – I may get flack for this one, but this is a popular choice made by people trying to find a healthy snack. Nuts that are sold in stores typically include those industrial seed oils mentioned above. They also can contain partially hydrogenated trans fats, which can contribute to chronic disease.

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These oils are so ubiquitous because they're often from government-subsidized crops, which make them cheap and plentiful. The problem with these oils is that they are extremely high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fats (PUFA). A diet high in these omega-6 fats will cause systemic inflammation in the body, which is an underlying commonality with all modern chronic degenerative diseases, including heart disease and diabetes.

The solution: Opt for cooking with coconut oil or ghee and using oils like extra-virgin olive oil and avocado oil for room temperature purposes like dressings.

2. Store-bought roasted nuts – I may get flack for this one, but this is one popular choice made by people trying to find a healthy snack. Nuts that are sold in stores typically include those industrial seed oils I just mentioned. They also can contain partially hydrogenated trans fats, which can contribute to chronic disease and inflammation as well.

Another issue when it comes to roasted nuts is that the monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats of the nuts are very prone to oxidation at high temperatures. The nuts you typically find in stores can be rancid, making a good fat a bad one.

The solution: Soaking raw organic nuts and roasting them yourself at a low to medium temperature for 10-20 minutes is one way to maximize the nutritional benefits that are locked in this food.

3. Agave nectar – This popular sweetener is described by many foods labeled as “healthy.” Foods like agave nectar are touted as a low-glycemic food and thus a better option to use for health conscious. The glycemic index grades carbohydrates based on how fast they will raise your blood sugar. This index is, in my opinion, overly simplistic and when used by itself for determining if a food is “good” or “bad.”

Agave nectar is highly processed and very high in fructose. Fructose, while low on the glycemic index, delays its damage to the body. Your body takes a while to convert the fructose into glucose, glycogen, lactate and fat in your liver. Agave nectar and other foods high in fructose have a very stressful impact on your liver, contributing to fatty liver disease and insulin resistance.

The solution: Use raw stevia, honey or grade b maple syrup in moderation to sweeten things up!

4. Low-fat foods – Since the 1950s, fat has been taken out of our foods because we were told it would clog our arteries and make us fat. Ever since that misguided advice, we’ve become the fattest and most chronically sick nation in the world.

The fact is, we need healthy fats for our health. Our brains, immune systems, hormones and cell function depend on this precious macronutrient. On top of being deficient in healthy fats, when a food is labeled “low-fat” it typically means they replaced the fat with lots of processed sugar or chemicals.

Fat doesn’t make us sick and gain weight; it’s what we have done to the fat that is the problem. Factory farmed animal fat, partially hydrogenated fats, highly processed oils like canola and vegetable will all lead to inflammation and chronic illness

The solution: Eat good fatty foods. Avocados, coconut oil, pastured eggs, full fat grass-fed kefir, and if you eat meat, fatty wild caught fish and grass fed beef.

5. Sugar-free foods – This misleading food labeling term confuses many people who are trying to avoid sugar. They consume sugar-free and “diet” drinks or food, thinking they’re picking the better option.

It’s really no secret now that the artificial sweeteners used in many sugar drinks are linked to chronic disease, and they actually make you gain weight. One study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that drinking just 12 ounces of diet soda a week increased risk of diabetes by 33%. Drinking 20 ounces of diet soda per week increased risk of diabetes by 66%!

Just to be clear, I am not suggesting that you go for the regular soda now, either! It is like picking between two slow poisons: Don’t go for either.

The solution: Try infusing sparkling water with fruits like lemon, lime or berries!

6. Whole grain foods – Research shows that a piece of whole wheat bread spikes your blood sugar just as much, if not more as a can of soda. The hybridization of our grain supply has created “super” sugars and increased the gluten content, both deleterious to your health. Even gluten-free grains like rice and oats can cause similar problems in people. Throughout history, when grains were consumed they were soaked, sprouted and fermented (and not hybridized or genetically modified for that matter).

The solution: Use grain-free options made from coconut flour, arrowroot starch, tapioca flour, plantain flour and almond flour.

7. Gluten-free snack foods – The gluten free popularity has brought along a lot of “gluten free” junk foods. They typically contain nutrient deficient array of gluten-free rancid oils, gluten-free processed sugar, and gluten-free refined grains. As I’ve written in the past, just because something is labeled “gluten free” does not make it healthy for you.

The solution: Make your own gluten-free snacks, like kale or sweet potato chips!

8. Foods labeled “All Natural” – Calling something “natural” is probably the most common marketing word used on food labels. The problem is when someone buys their foods based on marketing terms, they’re basically shooting in the dark and hoping for the best. The word “natural” when used on a boxed food label basically means nothing. Anything, as long as it originally came from the earth can be labeled “natural.” No matter how processed or nutrient-deficient that food may be, it can still be called “natural.”

The solution: Read the ingredients, not just the food labels. If the ingredients look like a chemistry project or they are ingredients mentioned in this article, you might want to save your money.