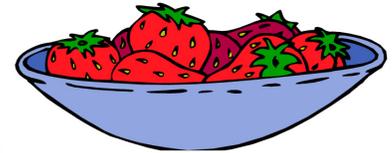


Levels of Food Processing

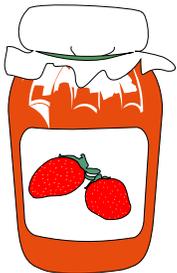
Food processing is the action of transforming raw agricultural products, like grains, vegetables, meat, or milk, into end products ready to be sold. Most foods that we consume require some processing. Everything from chopping to mixing ingredients to packaging can be considered a part of food processing. A processed food has been changed physically or chemically after being harvested. The amount of processing varies from food to food, ranging from minimal to high.

Minimally Processed: In this category, food is changed only a small amount between the farm and the consumer.

These foods might have been washed, peeled, sliced, juiced, frozen, dried, or pasteurized. They have few ingredients (often only one), which are all things that could be found in a home kitchen. Examples include skim milk, pre-washed and torn lettuce, frozen vegetables, and flour. A packaged pancake mix that includes only the minimally processed dry ingredients and requires the consumer to add milk, eggs, and oil at home could also be considered a minimally processed food. Many foods in this category are ingredients that would be used to cook a meal at home.



Moderately Processed: Foods in this category have been changed a medium amount from the form in which they left the farm. In addition to being washed, peeled, and juiced, ingredients may be mixed, cooked, and have preservatives added. Products often have several ingredients, most (but probably not all) of which could be found in a home kitchen. Many of these foods still require some preparation before eating, and



they may be ingredients used in a home-cooked meal. Examples include a jar of spaghetti sauce, flavored yogurt, and bread. Another example could be a pancake mix that includes all the necessary ingredients, and you just add water to make the batter. This is different from the minimally processed pancake mix because the ingredient list will include some things that are highly processed, such as monocalcium phosphate, dextrose, and glucose solids.

Highly Processed: These foods generally have many ingredients and are mostly or fully prepared in the factory. Little or no preparation needs to be done before eating. Many snack foods like chips and candy are highly processed. Frozen pizzas and microwave dinners are also highly processed. These foods contain ingredients not found in a home kitchen that add vitamins and minerals, enhance flavor and texture, and extend shelf life. Individual ingredients may be processed before being combined for further processing. Some ingredients commonly found in highly processed foods include high fructose corn syrup (sugar extracted from corn), polysorbate 65 (an emulsifier that keeps water and oils mixed), and sodium erythorbate (a food additive in processed meats that helps to retain color and improve flavor).

