

## So what is there left for us to eat!

Our diet is constantly been invaded by processed foods because of its delicious taste, ease of putting it on the table and even price. We start our day with bacon and sausages for breakfast, lunch box is often with salami or other cold meats. Dinner could be a slice of meat loaf from the market and other cold meats followed by after dinner cheese platter. And if we do not have time to prepare a set meal for the evening, a pizza or a restaurant food would do just fine, all full of processed food.

Most foods are processed – changed, prepared or packaged – in some way before we eat them. They fall somewhere on a spectrum from minimally processed (like salad mix, bagged dry beans, roasted nuts or frozen fruits and vegetables) to what some nutrition experts refer to as highly or ultra processed (like ready-to-eat meals and snack foods). Some processed foods have ingredients added, like sweeteners, oils, colours and preservatives. Some are fortified to add nutrients like fiber, calcium or vitamin D. Some are simply prepped for convenience (washed or chopped) or packaged to last longer. Processes such as pasteurizing milk, canning fruits and vegetables, and vacuum packing meats help prevent spoilage and increase food safety. Even foods labelled “natural” or “organic” can be processed.

If you eat a lot of highly processed foods, you risk getting too much sodium, added sugars and unhealthy fats. Highly processed foods contribute almost 60% of calories and 90% of added sugars in the American diet, according to a 2016 research study.[\[1\]](#) Moreover, diet consumption of ultra-processed foods has been shown to increase cancer risk greater than 10%.[\[2\]](#)

Then we have conflicting advice from various quarters. One day, an egg a day is fine but the next day it is not safe for those who have high cholesterol. Peanuts and other nuts are *No No* by many experts. I remember my niece in India telling me that her American trained paediatrician advised her to not to give kidney beans, nuts and eggs to her baby before the end of the year. Peanuts are the cheapest source of proteins and fat in LMICs. Studies have shown that the early introduction of peanuts significantly decreased the frequency of the development of peanut allergy among children at high risk for this allergy and modulated immune responses to peanuts.[\[3\]](#)

Annalisa Palmer beautifully puts it in One Green Planet[\[4\]](#), “Processed food is almost everywhere these days, and it’s definitely not for the better. *Our* health is getting worse with each passing day, and if people don’t stand up or take matters into their own hands, we won’t get healthier. One change one day, two changes the next day, and so on, is all it takes to reclaim your health, so start today by picking one of these swaps”:

1. Fruit instead of Fruit Juice
2. Potatoes instead of Potato Chips
3. Tomatoes instead of Ketchup
4. Applesauce instead of Canned Fruit
5. Brown Rice instead of White Rice
6. Tofu or Tempeh instead of Chicken Nuggets
7. Hummus instead of Mayonnaise
8. Vegetables instead of Vegetable Flavoured Chips
9. Steel-Cut Oatmeal *or home made whole wheat* bread instead of Cereal
10. Water instead of Soda *or other aerated drinks*.

Reducing your intake of processed food has to start somewhere. Implement these ten swaps into your daily routine, and you’ll be well on your way to a healthier you!

Simplistic advice is to cook more food at home, avoid processed food. Special attention should be given to excessive sugars, salt and fats in daily diet. 70% of salt (sodium) in our diet comes from commercially processed food and restaurant foods. Overweight and obesity is associated with many chronic diseases and cancers. Daily exercise is a must for good health and one must try to find time for this. Monitor your weight and keep it within normal limits for your weight and height that is Body Mass Index not exceeding 25 [BMI=Weight in Kgs divided twice by Height in Meters] e.g. Weight 70 Kg Height 1.71 Mts.  $BMI=70/(1.71*1.71)$ . BMI = 23.9

### References:

[1] <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/processed-foods>

[2] Thibault Fiolet et al. Consumption of ultra-processed foods and cancer risk: results from NutriNet-Santé prospective cohort

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[3] George Du Toit et al. Randomized Trial of Peanut Consumption in Infants at Risk for Peanut Allergy *N Engl J Med* 2015;372:803-13. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1414850

[4] Annalisa Palmer. Processed foods can easily be replaced by whole food. One green Planet. <https://www.onegreenplanet.org>