

Processed Food & Quick Meals

Let us first learn about **what exactly are processed foods**. The IHSFNA gives a good definition of processed food: Processed food is any food that's altered during preparation to make it more convenient, shelf-stable or flavorful. Some foods are much more processed than others. A bagged salad or pre-cut green beans technically count as processed, but it's only minimally processed because its natural state hasn't changed. In other words, it looks pretty much the same as you'd find it in nature. A box of macaroni and cheese or a microwavable dinner, on the other hand, are considered heavily processed (also called ultra-processed) because they've been chemically altered with artificial flavors, additives, and other ingredients.

Some items like canned tomatoes are not a concern because the process of canning conserves nutrients and freshness. But items such as cake mixes, some pasta sauces, or microwavable meals are a concern because they have been heavily processed.

What is so alarming is that many of us include a lot of processed foods in our diet. For example, in an American diet more than ½ of its calories come from very processed foods.

Most of the heavy processed foods **lack important nutrients** and that is why we can read on some packings "fortified in fiber, iron, vitamin C...".

They are also **often too high in sugar, fat and/or sodium, contain a lot of artificial ingredients, have too many calories and are addicting.**

In addition, these kinds of foods are quicker to digest than unprocessed foods, and therefore our bodies burn less energy during the digestion process.

All this **can lead to very serious health problems** such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, or cancer. A five-year study of more than 100,000 people found that every 10% increase in consumption of processed food has been associated with a 12% higher risk for cancer.

It is understandable that if you are a busy mom, a busy professional, and anything else that makes you super busy, quick meals found at the supermarket can help you gain time, but they will also make you gain weight.

Note that there are ways to cook quick, delicious, and healthy meals. And even to make your own frozen quick meals for the days when you really don't have much time.