

Healthy Living

What to know about processed foods

Anyone looking to eat right undoubtedly knows there's no shortage of advice in relation to dietary habits. Fad diets and nutritional trends are shared on social media platforms and websites every day. While access to such information is more available than ever, the volume of data can be overwhelming, especially for people looking to make simple and healthy tweaks.

One trending topic among advocates for improved nutrition concerns processed foods. Various health concerns, from the obesity epidemic to increased rates of high blood pressure, have been traced to processed foods. Such associations merit consideration, and that begins with answering some common questions surrounding processed foods.

What are processed foods?

The United States Department of Agriculture defines processed foods as any raw agricultural commodity that has been altered from its original state. Such alterations occur when foods are subjected to various processes, including pasteurization, blanching, freezing, dehydrating, or fermenting, among others. Fortification is another means to processing foods.

Is processing always unhealthy?

Processing food

is not always bad for human beings. For example, milk is pasteurized and commercial milk products are fortified with vitamin D. In regard to fortified milk, adding vitamin D ensures milk drinkers receive sufficient amounts of a nutrient that helps strengthen bones.

So why the fear of processed foods?

The negative characterizations of processed foods arises mainly from foods that are considered ultra-processed. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics uses a spectrum to differentiate between various types of processed foods. Minimally processed foods include washed fresh spinach, while heavily processed foods include ready-to-eat foods like cereal and crackers. The negative attributes often associated with processed foods typically refers to heavily processed foods, which may also be referred to as ultra-processed foods.

What are some examples of minimally processed and ultra-processed foods?

Potatoes are perhaps the simplest example of how a single food item can sometimes be healthy and other times lack nutrition, even though it's the same item. A baked potato is minimally processed because it's been altered from its original state after being washed and baked. But the

nutritional profile remains largely the same after these minimal adjustments to the potato. French fries are made from potatoes, but they're often greatly altered from their original state after being fried in oil. French fries also tend to be heavily salted, further-

Adults are not short on options when they seek ways to improve their overall physical health. Whether it's signing up for a membership at a local fitness facility or riding a bicycle as part of a daily routine or going for a morning jog each day, there's a lot people can do to incorporate more physical activity into their lives.

Each physical activity offers its own unique benefits, and the discipline known as Pilates can be great for individuals looking to reap a multitude of rewards. Pilates has an interesting origin story, as it was the brainchild of German-born emigré to England Joseph Pilates, who was interned on the Isle of Man upon the outbreak of World War I. Pilates, who was a sickly child but grew into an adult who was so physically fit he taught self-defense to detectives at Scotland Yard, used his time in the internment camp to experiment with a new approach to exercise. Pilates's tinkering was a nascent form of what's now a popular approach to fitness that bears his name.

Pilates has attracted millions of people across the globe, and the many benefits of the approach are undoubtedly

ing altering them from their original state and thus lowering their nutritional profile.

What can I do to avoid eating heavily processed foods?

The Mayo Clinic Health System advises reading food labels to analyze items in relation

a big part of that allure.

- Pilates and back pain relief: The Hospital for Special Surgery notes that Pilates is a core-focused approach that can keep the back sturdy and help people alleviate back pain, particularly discomfort that affects the lower back. The Cleveland Clinic notes that lack of core strength can contribute to lower back pain, so it's no surprise a core-focused approach like Pilates can help people overcome lower back pain.

- Pilates and improved flexibility: Anyone who has ever engaged in a Pilates workout or watched others do so has likely noticed that the approach involves a lot of stretching. So it's no surprise that Pilates helps to improve flexibility. And as the Cleveland Clinic notes, improving flexibility can minimize injury risk, as a body that's flexible is less vulnerable to strains and pulls that can sideline athletes who do not incorporate stretching into their routines.

- Pilates and better balance: Improved balance is another benefit of Pilates. Pilates strengthens the lower back, hips and abdominal muscles, which helps to build a sturdy center that can help adults maintain their balance. That's a par-

to how processed they may or may not be. Foods that contain additives and preservatives like high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, food dyes, sodium nitrates, sodium nitrites, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and sulfites are best avoided or con-

ticularly notable benefit for adults in middle age, as UCLA Health notes that balance begins to decline around age 50. By engaging with a core-focused approach like Pilates, adults can counter age-related loss of balance. And maintaining balance into older adulthood is especially beneficial, as it can reduce the risk for falls that can adversely affect older adults' physical and mental health as well as their ability to continue to live independently.

- Pilates and body awareness: The Cleveland Clinic notes that Pilates encourages people to focus on their breathing and bodies. That emphasis can help them better understand their bodies, including their weaknesses and when something might be off.

sumed in low amounts.

The debate around processed foods is complicated. People seeking to bolster the nutritional profile of their diets are urged to avoid ultra-processed foods and work with a physician or dietitian to ensure they're making healthy choices.

The benefits of Pilates

Such recognition may reduce injury risk because people will be better attuned when something is off than they otherwise might be. The fewer injuries physically active people suffer, the more they can continue to move about, which can serve as a safeguard against the many pitfalls of a sedentary lifestyle.

Pilates is an approach to physical fitness that can pay numerous dividends. Adults willing to give Pilates a shot are urged to begin that pursuit under the tutelage of an experienced instructor.



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