



Eat Unprocessed Foods

CHALLENGE
Choose
unprocessed
foods this
month.

Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Keep a written record of the days you eat unprocessed foods.
2. Read "Eat Unprocessed Foods."
3. To complete the Challenge, you must eat unprocessed foods on at least 22 days of this month.
4. Keep a record of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

When California resident Joey Chestnut is hungry, he knows what his stomach wants...hot dogs. The Major League Eating champ holds the record for eating 68 hot dogs with buns in less than 10 minutes. Chestnut's hot dog habit may seem extreme. However, most Americans already take part in their own version of championship eating when it comes to processed food.

People love "junk food." Every year Americans eat 750 million hot dogs, and snack on 1.2 billion pounds of potato chips. In 2010, people drank about 15 billion gallons of soda pop and ate 3 billion pizzas. And a fast food drive-thru is just around the corner in most cities and towns across the country. The demand for processed food keeps expanding, right along with the nation's weight problem.

About 63 percent of adults are overweight or obese. At the heart of the obesity problem is a lack of exercise and a glut of available processed foods like potato chips, ice cream, cookies, French fries, and hamburgers.

If you eat a lot of processed foods, you're at risk for heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. But even small positive changes to your diet can make a big difference. If fruits and vegetables, nuts, and legumes are already part of your diet, way to go! If you think you could make better food choices, now is a great time to begin.



The Problem with Processed Foods

If you eat a hamburger with French fries and gulp down a soft drink, the food you've just eaten contains large amounts of sodium, sugar, trans fats, and calories. Processed foods like buttered movie theater popcorn, candy bars, energy drinks, and many frozen microwave meals are also high in calories. Eating too much processed food puts you at risk for a range of health problems, including obesity.

Sodium/Salt

A typical fast food meal contains at least 1,300 mg of sodium, and often more. That's a lot when the daily recommended amount of sodium is 1,500 to 2,300 mg. Other processed foods like packaged cheese, canned soups, and meals-in-a-box also contain high amounts of sodium. Read the labels and you'll see.

Too much sodium in your diet can lead to high blood pressure, which can cause heart disease or stroke. About 800,000 people die each year from a heart attack or stroke. One reason for these deaths is the high amount of sodium people get from eating fast food and processed foods. In the United States, the average person eats about 3,400 mg of sodium per day, largely from fast food and processed foods, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sugar

The average 12-ounce soft drink contains 39 grams of sugar. But the recommended daily limit of sugar is just 20 grams for women and 36 grams for men. Soft drinks, sweet treats, and excess carbohydrates can raise your blood sugar level. Many processed foods, drinks, desserts, and condiments contain high amounts of sugar, most often *high-fructose corn syrup*. In a recent Princeton study, animals fed this corn-based, man-made sweetener had abnormal weight gain. The glucose-fed animals did not. Sugar is your body's primary source of energy, but too much can lead to weight gain and diabetes.

About 190,000 people in the United States die from diabetes each year. Right now about 26 million Americans have diabetes; another 79 million have pre-diabetes. It's the seventh leading cause of death and a major cause of heart disease – America's number-one killer. In most cases, diabetes can be prevented with a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Trans fats

Donuts from your local bakery, French fries, onion rings, crispy crackers, and many frozen meals contain trans fats. Also called hydrogenated fats, trans fats were created to lengthen the shelf life of processed foods. Sadly, these man-made fats also raise the level of bad cholesterol in your body, clog your arteries, and increase your risk for heart disease. Since 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has required food manufacturers to list trans fats in products or menu items if they have at least 0.5 grams per serving.



Q: What Are Unprocessed Foods?

A: Foods that you could grow or make yourself.

That doesn't mean you have to take up organic farming. But if a food label lists ingredients you've never heard of, the contents are probably processed.

So, if you take fast food, crackers, cookies, canned soup, and packaged meals off the table, what's left? Plenty. When you're ready to prepare your next meal or take a trip to the grocery store, here's what to look for.



Fresh fruits & raw or steamed vegetables

Just give these delicious foods a chance to prove themselves. Have you ever eaten hot corn on the cob without butter or salt? The kernels are sweet and juicy all by themselves. Steamed broccoli – without sauce or cheese – is also mildly sweet. So are peas, cauliflower, carrots, sweet potatoes, and red bell pepper.

Fresh fruits like blueberries, strawberries, and banana are excellent toppers to cereal or yogurt. Freeze fresh fruits to make a thick fruit smoothie. Dark-colored fruits and vegetables are especially rich in antioxidants that help keep the heart healthy.



Eating fruits and vegetables can help lower blood pressure, reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke, and keep your blood sugar and cholesterol levels in check. Fruits and vegetables are also good sources of minerals, vitamins, and fiber. In

a recent study, eating more fiber helped people reduce the amount of fat surrounding their organs by 4 percent during a five-year period. Aim to eat 5-9 servings of vegetables and fruits each day.

Whole grains



Choose whole-grain bread, brown rice, and steel-cut oats. In a recent study, people who ate at least 2.5 servings per day of whole grains (found in brown rice, bran, and some

breakfast cereals) reduced their risk of heart disease by 30 percent. In another study, people who ate a high-fiber diet (at least 26 grams per day) from whole grains, fruits, and vegetables decreased their risk of early death by 22 percent compared to those who ate less fiber during the nine-year study.

Healthy Proteins



Legumes, fish, lean meats, and poultry are low in saturated fat and are a good source of protein. Adults should get at least 46-56 grams of protein per day.

Protein- and fiber-rich legumes include black beans, kidney beans, lima beans, and garbanzo beans. Add them to a homemade soup or salad. For fish and poultry, skip the processed frozen fish sticks and deli meats like bologna. Instead, choose fresh-



caught salmon or canned tuna. For poultry, choose baked chicken or low-fat cooked turkey slices – not luncheon slices, but the real thing. About one-fourth of your plate at each meal should include healthy proteins.

The trick to being successful is substituting healthier foods that are also tasty. Remember to keep whole, unprocessed foods in mind.



[More —>](#)



Eat This. Not That.

Most processed foods have healthy alternatives. For example:

- ✓ Eat fresh instead of canned tomatoes. A serving of fresh tomatoes contains about 2 mg of sodium. But a serving of canned tomatoes contains 200-300 mg of sodium.
- ✓ Drink water instead of soda pop. A 12-ounce sugary soft drink has about 180 calories. Calorie count for water: 0.
- ✓ Eat an apple instead of a candy bar. A typical candy bar – and many “protein bars” too – contain about 250 calories, plus unhealthy fat. An apple has only 80 calories and comes with a healthy serving of fiber and other nutrients.
- ✓ Serve a fresh fruit salad instead of a packaged dessert.
- ✓ Eat fresh or frozen vegetables instead of canned. (Same for fruit.)
- ✓ Choose whole-grain, low-sugar cereals instead of highly processed, brightly colored, sugary cereals.



Do It Yourself.

- ✓ Make your own soup with all fresh ingredients. Pass on high-sodium canned soup.
- ✓ Shake up your own salad dressing.
- ✓ Bake a cake from scratch, not from a box.
- ✓ Make your own pancakes using whole-grain flour instead of ready-made mixes in a bag.

One Day at a Time

- ✓ Try planning out your meals a week in advance.
- ✓ Just say NO to frozen entrees. If you don't feel like preparing an elaborate entree, make something that's easier. Try a burrito with a whole-wheat tortilla, black beans, brown rice, salsa, jack cheese, and fresh avocado. Roll, bake, and eat.
- ✓ Give up eating canned foods for a day.
- ✓ For one meal a day (see samples below), eat all unprocessed foods.

Breakfast:

- Fresh-squeezed orange juice
- Cooked steel-cut oats topped with blueberries
- Scrambled eggs or egg whites

Lunch:

- Grilled chicken breast
- Green salad with walnuts and dried cranberries
- Salad dressing made from extra-virgin olive oil and vinegar

Dinner:

- Baked salmon, with olive oil, garlic, and herbs
- Steamed broccoli
- Baked sweet potatoes mashed with orange juice

Snacks:

- Popcorn (air-popped)
- Vegetables with hummus made from garbanzo beans
- Fruit smoothie

Sources:

Princeton University.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 49(1)93-96.
Making fast food even faster. The New York Times.
Lifestyle factors and 5-year abdominal fat accumulation in a minority cohort: The IRAS Family Study. Obesity.
Harvard School of Public Health.
American Journal of Kidney Disease, 55(4):A31-2.
American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 70(3)412-419.
National Restaurant Association.
National Institutes of Health.
Institute of Medicine.
Archives of Internal Medicine, 171(12):1061-1068.
Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH.
National Institutes of Health.



Unprocessed Foods are Heart-Healthy

For food tips and recipes:

Delicious Decisions
American Heart Association
<http://tinyurl.com/84fx7sa>

Stay Young At Heart
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
<http://tinyurl.com/49mnn3>

Healthy Eating at Home
Harvard School of Public Health
<http://tinyurl.com/5w7go8>





Eat Unprocessed Foods

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you ate more unprocessed food and less processed food than you usually do.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you ate more unprocessed food and less processed food. You must meet this goal on at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this practice for a lifetime of best health!
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

CHALLENGE
Choose unprocessed foods this month.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUN.	MON.	TUE.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.	Weight & weekly summary
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_____ Number of days this month I ate unprocessed foods

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____

