

# Reduce your consumption of ultra-processed foods

## Definition of an ultra-processed food

Two factors help us to define and recognize ultra-processed foods:

1. The original food has gone through major **physical, chemical or biological changes** using industrial processes;
2. They contain **additives and/or ingredients that are not used in home cooking** and are reserved for industrial use (hydrogenated oils, modified starch, etc.).

Here are a few examples of foods:



**FOODS THAT ARE NOT OR ARE BARELY PROCESSED**



**PROCESSED FOODS**



**ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS**

<b>Meats</b>	Meats or deli meats preserved only with salt	Chicken nuggets or reconstituted meat, deli meats with nitrites
<b>Fish and seafood</b>	Canned fish without extra processing	Fish sticks
<b>Milk</b>	Artisanal cheeses, plain yogurt	Flavoured milk-based drinks, sweetened creamy desserts
<b>Fresh fruit</b>	Cooked or canned fruit	Sweetened fruit-based desserts with added sugar and artificial flavouring
<b>Fresh vegetables</b>	Plain canned or frozen vegetables or those prepared without additives	Dehydrated vegetable soups, ready-to-serve seasoned vegetables with sauces, vegetable patties containing additives
<b>Flour</b>	Fresh bread	Industrial buns, cakes and cookies

## Why limit ultra-processed foods?

- **They often have more calories and lower nutritional quality:** they are high in salt/sodium, sugar and poor-quality fats and are low in fibre, vitamins and minerals. Consuming too much salt, sugar or saturated fat can increase the risk of chronic illness.
- **They can contain additives** whose long-term, specific impacts on health are not yet known. It is therefore recommended that you limit your intake of them.
- **Prolonged contact with their packaging** due to their long shelf life can affect your health.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Ultra-processed foods are the main source of sodium in Canadians' diets. It is recommended that you limit your intake of salt and salted products, as consuming too much salt promotes high blood pressure, which can cause cardiovascular disease.

## How can you limit your intake of ultra-processed foods?

- **Opt for home cooking as much as possible** by emphasizing fresh, seasonal products and unprocessed canned or frozen foods. This also allows you to generate less waste by limiting packaging!
- **Prepare your favourite highly processed foods yourself** (muffins, pizza, frozen meals, etc.).
- **Have on hand ingredients for balanced snacks that are easy to make at home:** fruit, vegetables cut in sticks with homemade dips, nuts, etc.
- **Avoid grocery shopping on an empty stomach, and make a list ahead of time.**
- **Check food labels to make the healthiest choices.** Avoid products whose list of ingredients is long and difficult to decipher: that is, ingredients with unpronounceable names that are not found in our pantries. It is also important to know that ingredients are listed from highest to lowest amounts in the product. For example, if sugar is listed first, it makes up the largest part of the product.
- **Watch out for foods with colourful and attractive packaging,** as they are often ultra-processed foods.



**GOOD TO KNOW**  
Sugary drinks

Sugary drinks are also included in the list of highly processed foods. By sugary drinks, we mean fruit juices, fruit drinks, syrups, flavoured water, pop and energy drinks. Drinking a sugary drink every day increases the risk of weight gain, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

**For this reason, water is the only recommended drink, because it is essential. Water can also be provided through tea, coffee (in moderation) and unsweetened herbal teas.**

“To reference this tool: Global-Watch. (2022). *Reduce your consumption of ultra-processed foods*, available at [www.global-watch.com](http://www.global-watch.com).”