

Health Alert: Some Secrets of the Processed Food Industry

When it comes to our health, processed food is public enemy number one. In order to win any battle, you must know your enemy.

Journalist Michael Moss went behind enemy lines. He learned the secrets the processed food industry uses to keep us hooked.

Most of us know that we should stay away from processed foods, and those sugary processed drinks, but they're just so hard to resist.

"The food that we hate to love and that we're so tempted by, and will overeat, is a problem. And the solution is gaining control of it," Moss said.

Processed Money Makers

Moss is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist for *The New York Times*. He infiltrated America's largest processed food companies, like Kraft, Coca-Cola, Kellogg, Nestle and General Mills.

In his book, *Salt, Sugar, Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, he exposes how they addicted us.

"They got big by making products that are utterly irresistible to people, both in taste, but also ultra-convenient that will sit on the shelf and be waiting for you until you're ready to eat them. And also incredibly low cost," he said.

They may be low cost at the checkout line, but we pay dearly later on, with our health and lost productivity. Doctors trace our obesity epidemic back to processed foods, and so do the people making those products.

"The startling thing is that the food industry has known for years and years that it's at least partly responsible for that," he said.

Processed foods kill with staggering amounts of salt, sugar, usually high fructose corn syrup, and fat, mostly trans fat, also known as hydrogenated oil.

"I don't view the food industry as some evil empire that intentionally sought to make us obese or otherwise ill," he explained. "The issue is, kind-of their collective zeal to do what companies do, which is to make as much money as possible by selling as much product as possible."

Marketing the Bliss Point

Inside the food labs of the processed food companies, scientists use cutting-edge technology formulating what's known as a food's "bliss point," or it's maximum flavor and allure. That usually means one thing: sugar.

"Prepared pasta sauces on the shelf in the grocery store are really sweet," Moss said. "They will have the sugar, the equivalent of two Oreo cookies per tiny little half cup serving. I've started making my own pasta sauce and it's not that hard."

They also lure us with texture. By manipulating a food's chemical structure, scientists achieve ultimate, what they call "mouthfeel." They also invented ways to disguise the sensation of being full.

"Those chips will compel you to eat more and more beyond what you should, and you'll go back for more bags and more bags."

Processed food companies know we consumers are concerned about nutrition. So they devise marketing tricks to make their products appear healthy. They'll dial-back on one bad ingredient, while secretly pumping-up others.

“So for example you can find a yogurt that sells itself as being low-fat but it can, and often does, have as much sugar in it, and calories, as a serving of ice cream,” he explained.

Labels tout healthy ingredients like calcium, olive oil or fruit. But the amount of the good stuff is minuscule. A close look still shows shocking levels of salt, sugar and unhealthy fat.

Shoppers Be Wise

But we shoppers have a few tricks of our own. We can resist the temptation to buy processed foods by shopping when we're full and hydrated.

Arm yourself with a good list, and don't buy anything unless it's on the list.

Also, spend more time on the perimeter of the store, where you'll find the fresh foods.

When you are in the center part of the store, be wary of the products at eye level. Grocers put those tasty, unhealthy items right in front of our face because they are the ones that sell the most.

So while processed food is delicious, cheap, and convenient, it could ruin your health. The extra effort to eat fresh food will likely pay off in the long run.

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