

These Foods May Be Killing You—6 Ways to Fight Back

It may seem obvious that eating whole, healthy foods will lead to an overall healthier body and brain, but the truth is, it's only recently that researchers have really been focusing on studying the complex links between the food we eat, and how our brain and body react.

Could your lunch be increasing your risk for cancer?

Recently, a scientific study conducted over a period of eight years showed a significant link between the amount of processed foods consumed and the risk that person had of developing cancer. Even a 10 percent increase in ultra-processed foods in the diet led to a 10 percent increase in the risk of developing overall (various kinds of) cancer. This is one of the first studies conducted that showcase the percentage risk, but you can bet they'll be many more coming out in the next few years.

The study above also showed that it wasn't just that when a person eats more processed foods, they will naturally eat less of healthy, whole foods like fruits, vegetables and lean proteins. The scientists conducting the study concluded that it was likely the additional additives that are put in processed foods to prolong their shelf life or to give them a more appealing taste or color that actually increase the risk of developing cancer.

Increased Risk for Developing Alzheimer's Disease

It's not just cancer that processed foods put you at a greater risk for Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias have also been linked to consumption of fatty and highly processed foods.

The brain, just like the body or like your car, relies on fuel to continue running. If you give it only the worst kind of fuel, it's logical to conclude that performance will suffer. When we consume large amounts of processed foods filled with unhealthy fats, sugars, preservatives and chemicals, we are actually forcing our body to produce toxins as it attempts to break these items down and use them for fuel. These toxins can lead to widespread inflammation in the brain, and this inflammation can lead to the buildup of brain plaques and tangles that characterize Alzheimer's Disease.

The first step is to identify where processed foods hide in your diet.

When it comes to American cuisine, the sad truth is that processed foods lurk around every corner: in your pantry, fridge, grocery store and favorite restaurants. Processed foods are often filled with salt and sugar to give them a taste that's appealing, but there's nothing appealing about what they do to your brain and body. Here's a list of some commonly consumed processed foods. Some of these might surprise you!

- breakfast cereals
- chips
- most crackers
- essentially all fast food
- most packaged breads, biscuits, bagels and muffins
- canned items, even vegetables
- microwave popcorn
- many sliced or shredded cheeses
- bottled drinks like soda, high-sugar teas and even some fruit juices
- packaged lunch meat (one of the worst culprit of chemical additives)
- packaged hot dogs and sausages
- refined oils like vegetable oil

- “imitation foods” like margarine or miracle whip
- most products that advertise themselves as “low fat” or “fat-free”

With a list like that, how can we try and eat cleaner and avoid these processed foods?

Avoiding processed foods is all about educating yourself on how horrible they are for our health, and then knowing how to implement some healthier alternatives!

1. Preparation is key.

Most processed foods are bought and sold because of how fast or convenient they are, and so a big part in avoiding these unhealthy foods is planning ahead. Taking two hours on a weekend or another day you’re free to cut up some vegetables and fruit for snacks, and to prepare a few healthy options for the week is so worth it! Eating healthy doesn’t have to be crazy expensive or time-consuming. Try our 5-day menu plan today if you’re looking for somewhere to get started.

2. Choose whole foods over packaged alternatives.

As a general rule, the more “whole” a food is, the better it’s going to be for you. With meats, this might mean buying raw chicken breasts over some packaged, ready-to-eat chicken lunch meat. Instead of turning to a highly processed, sugar-stuffed cereal, try making some organic oatmeal instead. You can add your favorite fruit, some nuts or even coconut shavings on top to make it more fun.

3. Read the labels.

If you think a package of crackers looks healthy, but then you read the label and can’t even pronounce half of the ingredients, that means that food is highly processed. When you start seeing a bunch of chemicals and dyes listed in the ingredients, know that your body and brain will suffer. Start

reading the labels for some of your favorite snacks today and I bet you'll be surprised.

4. Avoid refined grains and refined sugars.

If you're looking to reduce inflammation and live with a healthier brain, body and waistline, then avoiding refined grains is key. Refined grains include products made with enriched wheat flour, white flour, white rice, cornmeal and so forth. Turn instead to options like quinoa, brown rice, whole oats and an organic, whole-wheat flour (unless wheat gives you problems).

Refined sugars hide everywhere and are consumed in quantities that wouldn't have even been thought possible just 40 years ago. They hide under names like sucrose, agave nectar, aspartame, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, neotame, stevia extract, saccharin, sucralose, sugar alcohols and so on. Make sure to check your yogurts, breads, beverages, crackers and other snacks to see if they're filled with these refined sugars and avoid them at all costs.

5. Know that "low-fat" and "fat-free" do not mean healthy.

When making low-fat and fat-free kinds of foods, the fat is taken out and then, to make these foods still taste good, they're filled with even more unhealthy and processed ingredients. Fat-free and low-fat yogurts, milks, ice creams, crackers and so on are not healthy alternatives. Better to go with the full-fat options or eat some fruits and vegetables instead.

6. Know that eating healthy doesn't mean you have to miss out.

Cutting out processed foods doesn't mean you have to cut out great taste. You can join our free Faith & Fit program below and get access to hundreds of great, cost-effective recipes that will help you start cutting out these harmful processed foods. {eoa}

Michelle Spadafora started Faithful Workouts in 2009 after 22 years in the fitness industry. She created Faithful Workouts to be a place where you can come and strengthen your relationship with God while you strengthen your body and mind, a place where you can find great workouts for all fitness levels, receive simple, practical nutrition information and connect with a real community who knows that the journey to better health is more about encouraging each other and less about being perfect.

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