

Get The Facts: Processed Foods

Myth:

Processed foods are horrible for you and organic foods are the healthiest option available.

Fact:

The wave of fad diets introduced the layman to words such as processed and organic foods. Since these terms became mainstream, the more popular they got, the less meaning they had. When people talk to me about organic, non processed, non-GMO foods, they automatically assume that I am on the bandwagon. Terms like unhealthy, chemicals, toxins, and pesticides are thrown around in these conversations constantly. But what toxins, chemicals, and "unhealthiness" are people referring to?

Let's break it down from the top. As far as macronutrients and calories are concerned, organic carrots vs conventional carrots are exactly the same. Nowhere can you find organic veggies or meats that are a different proportion of fats, carbs, or protein than others. Now the micronutrients. Extensive research has been conducted in this field and there is really not much to show for it. The only significant results found were slightly increased levels of nitrates and agrochemical (pesticide) residues in non organic foods. Both of these are **well** below the FDA regulation levels and nitrates in general have not been shown to cause health problems in humans (omitting the rat studies where they pumped animals with liters of nitrates). Chemical wise, there is nothing to harm you in foods that are not "certified" organic. Also, many companies weasel their way around the certification guidelines, however I do not have data for you to support this claim.

The next issue is pesticides. First of all, pesticides are there for a reason. Insects destroy crops as well as transmit diseases that can harm us, thus pesticides were developed. One study by Kajiya et. Al, showed parasitic infections associated with organic foods with one man contracting heart disease from hookworms after 30 years of organic only diets. Even though the pesticides were shown to be at low levels and harmless, the companies obliged and instead created genetically modified crops to ward off bugs. This again has been fought against because of the "clean eating" craze.

Finally, processed foods have been thought to be the toxic sludge of the food world. To clarify, nobody uses a set definition for "processed." The technical term is "altered from it's original state." This means refrigerating, carving, cleaning, or cooking any food makes it processed. I've heard people define it as "anything in a wrapper" which puzzles me; if I wrap my organic, GMO free, gluten free celery, is it now processed food and magically less nutritious?

Conclusion:

Chemicals, toxins, and unhealthiness are terms overused by media and corporations to allow prices on organic foods to remain 10 times normal. Trust that anything on shelves at a store has been thoroughly vetted by the FDA and has no harmful substances. As for the question of how to identify if something is healthy, well that depends on what you want with your diet. As stated in other issues, calories are the key to reaching body composition goals. And if your goals are just balanced diet and overall health, well, look at food labels. I guarantee once you find food that meets all of your nutrient needs, you won't have Coke, Twinkies, or Doritos in your pantry.

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