

PRODUCE PRESS

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SPOTLIGHT: ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS

Most foods in our food system are “processed” in some way. Processing and packaging foods helps keep it safe and convenient to purchase, store and eat. Baby carrots, for example, have been processed because they have been washed and cut and packaged. However, baby carrots are an example of a food that has been minimally processed. Baby carrots look like something found in nature and they still have the nutrients you would expect them to, with nothing added. You’ve probably heard the term “ultra processed foods” or UPFs; these are foods that have been highly processed. UPFs don’t typically look like foods found in nature and typically have lots of ingredients added. Cheese crackers would be an example of a UPF, made from wheat and cheese but with fat, salt, coloring and preservatives added to it, to make it into a cracker, with low amounts of the nutrients we typically would receive from whole wheat and cheese (fiber, calcium, protein and potassium). Often UPFs include high amounts of ingredients most people need less of, and not enough of the nutrients we need more of. These foods are also hyper-palatable, in other words, delicious and easy to eat too much of. For children, UPFs often take the place of more nutritious options, may lead to picky eating, and can contribute to nutrition habits that will have a negative impact on their long-term health. We sometimes can’t avoid UPFs, but it’s particularly important that children don’t rely too heavily on UPFs and learn to enjoy less processed foods as well.



TABLE TALK

If you are trying to reduce UPFs in your child’s diet (or your own), it’s important to have some good ideas for alternatives. Sometimes, the healthier alternative is still processed but has less salt and sugar added and includes more nutrients like fiber, protein and vitamins and minerals. Or consider serving fruits and vegetables, or other high nutrient food, with a UPF to increase nutrient value of the meal or snack.

Here are some ideas and examples of healthy swaps:

- Instead of cheese crackers, try apples and cheese stick
- Instead of flavored potato chips, try low sodium tortilla chip with salsa, or low fat, low salt popcorn
- Instead of sweetened breakfast cereal, try low sugar instant oatmeal or homemade oatmeal with diced apples
- Instead of soda, try sparkling water with a splash of juice
- Instead of candy bar, try low sugar trail mix
- Instead of fried chicken, try deli rotisserie chicken or baked breaded chicken tenders at home
- Instead of sweetened sports electrolyte drink, try unsweetened coconut water with a squeeze of lemon and pinch of salt
- Instead of graham crackers, try low sugar Greek yogurt and fruit parfait, topped with a few crushed graham crackers

IN THE KITCHEN

STOVETOP OLD FASHIONED OATS WITH SPICED UP APPLES AND LEMONY YOGURT



Cutting back on UPFs sometimes means more time in the kitchen. Save time by making meals and snacks in larger batches, which can be served several times throughout the week or frozen for a meal or snack at another time.

Ingredients

Recipe makes about 4 (1/2 cup) servings.

- 1 Tbsp butter
- 2 apples, diced with skin on
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 2 cups old-fashioned oats
- 3 cups water
- ½ tsp salt

Optional: ¼ cup of dried cranberries or raisins

Directions

Combine oats, water and salt in microwave safe bowl and microwave for 3-4 minutes until most of the water is absorbed. Add cranberries or raisins and let cool.

In a medium pot, add butter over medium heat and melt. Add diced apples, brown sugar, spices and stir to coat. Cook until apples are tender (about 3-5 minutes).

Turn heat off and add cooked oats, stir to warm.

Serve warm with a dollop of lemony yogurt

Optional Topping: Lemon flavored yogurt
12 oz low-fat plain Greek Yogurt (1.5 cups)
1 Tbsp honey
Zest and juice of 1 lemon

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