

# Processed food: Bliss or misery

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Food processing is a term for revolution in food, which led to the development of small businesses to large industries. Meals for each person wherever! Whatever! Whenever! If a north Indian wants to try a south Indian delicacy you have it packed in a pouch, ready to eat, you want to have an exotic fruit you have it, canned or dried, and sometimes fresh as well. From washing to cooking, to storage in a manipulated environment, there are numerous methods and techniques used in the processing of food. From minimally processed food packaging, pasteurization, drying, and freezing to food with multiple ingredients, are available in the market.

Food processing has bought a big change in terms of food security, food sustainability, and food availability. India has dropped from 38.9 to 27.5 in the past two decades on the scale of the global hunger index (Global Hunger Index, 2022) and processing has a major role to play in this reduction. The wastage of food, which earlier used to be very high has reduced to 40%. (UNEP Food Waste Index, 2021) Protein Energy Malnutrition which was earlier considered a major deficiency disease is now seen very rarely among the population of India.

With the help of processing, we can make a product according to the need of the population - calorie deficit, protein-rich, or rich in a particular nutrient. Despite all the benefits, there is still a danger that comes with the consumption of processed food, specifically highly-processed food or ultra-processed food. Popkin and his colleagues in their publication, the year 2021, define ultra-processed food as a multi-ingredient, industrially formulated mixture that is no longer recognized as its original plant source or animal source. Examples are coffee beverages, soda, sauces, jellies, bread, breakfast cereals, or on a broader category Ready-to-Eat, Ready-to-Cook, and Ready-to-Use can define ultra-processed products. The foods are easily available in the market and due to fast-moving life, people often go for food that comes in packaging for quick and easy consumption. The food is usually high in preservatives, sugars, and salt which can lead to obesity and is a cause of various non-communicable diseases. Overweight/obesity is a global problem. Various nations from being malnourished are now seen to have a population obese. Not just obesity, deficiency of micro-

nutrient is also a problem. Individuals rather than consuming a fruit, even when they are available, go for consumption of beverages made from the same fruits. Instead of having a home-cooked meal people go for what comes in a packet.

Various national and international bodies have given a limit for use and safe limits for consumption of preservatives. Now when people are consuming a high quantity of processed food the amount of preservative intake through various foods may cross the safe consumption limit and show adverse effects, leading to serious problems.

When an industry launches a new product, they brainwash the consumer through advertisement. Hiring celebrities to tell us that it's the best product and they too use it; they make people believe that they need it and the method or product that they are using is wrong. The most prominent example of this scam is turmeric earlier in the 70s industries criticized the use of turmeric in meals and now we see products being sold specifically in the name of turmeric.

Even though in India, or globally, we have overcome undernutrition but now we are moving towards a new phase of malnourishment that is overnutrition – obesity or overweight, and hidden hunger. To minimize the effects consumers should be mindful of what they are putting in their mouths and what will be the effects, as an industry, they should not manipulate the population to eat something not good for them, and scientists and industrialists should focus on bringing an equilibrium between processed food and healthy eating. Equilibrium has to be established between the requirement of the era and the laborious use of technology for the production of food to have a healthy life.

## References

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