

## HEALTHIER SWAPS

<b>X</b>	Sugary drinks (e.g. soft drinks, iced tea, hot chocolate)	<b>✓</b>	Water infused with fruit or herbs, or unsweetened herbal or spiced tea
	Sugary cereals		Plain Greek (lower-fat) yoghurt with added fresh fruit and/or unsalted nuts
	Packaged snacks		Fresh fruit, plain yoghurt, homemade unsalted popcorn, or unsalted nuts

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Think about how different your food is from its natural state.

### CHOOSE:

- ✓ Fresh or minimally processed foods, such as:
  - fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables
  - plain, unsweetened milk and yoghurt
  - fresh or frozen fish, chicken and meat
  - legumes (e.g. lentils, peas, beans and chickpeas)
- ✓ Home-cooked meals more often
- ✓ Snacks such as fresh whole fruit, unsalted nuts and seeds, homemade unsalted popcorn, or plain yoghurt

### WHEN POSSIBLE, AVOID:

- X** Foods with long ingredient lists
- X** Ready-made meals

### COMMON ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

- Sausages, ham, nuggets
- Instant soups and noodles
- Packaged bread and buns
- Biscuits, cakes, pastries and sweets
- Crisps, cereal bars and sugary breakfast cereals
- Soft drinks, fruit drinks, energy drinks
- Ready-made sauces and dressings
- Frozen pizzas and ready-made meals
- Protein powders (whey protein and whey protein isolate)



**BIDLĠET ŻĠGAR**  
**REBHIET**  
**KBAR**

KUL GHAL SAHTEK



**THINK**  
**BEFORE**  
**YOU EAT**

THE TRUTH ABOUT  
ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS



# WHAT ARE ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS?



Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are foods made in factories and do not look much like real food. Examples of real food include fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, chicken, meat, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds.

UPFs usually contain extra amounts of sugar, salt and unhealthy fats, as well as artificial colours, flavours and preservatives. These foods give the brain a quick “feel-good” effect and can lead to overeating. At the same time, they are low in important nutrients such as fibre, protein and vitamins.

Most of these foods are designed to taste very good and last a long time. Many UPFs are not good for your health because they are high in calories and low in nutritional value.

However, not all UPFs are unhealthy. Some can be helpful since they contain fibre, or added vitamins or minerals, such as:

## PLANT-BASED MILKS

(e.g. almond milk fortified with added calcium)

## INSTANT, UNSWEETENED PLAIN OATMEAL

(which provides fibre, vitamins and minerals)

## WHOLEGRAIN UPFS

e.g. wholegrain bread (which contains fibre)

These options can be included as **part of** a balanced diet.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Convenience may save time today, but it can cost our health in the long run. Eating too many ultra-processed foods is linked to:

- Overweight and obesity
- Increased waist circumference
- Higher risk of heart disease and stroke
- Increased levels of “bad” cholesterol (LDL)
- Reduced levels of “good” cholesterol (HDL)
- Reduced levels of beneficial gut bacteria
- Higher risk of diabetes and cancer
- Feeling tired and experiencing low mood
- Increased risk of early death

## HOW TO SPOT ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Look for signs such as:

- Long ingredient lists
- Additives or ingredients you do not recognise, e.g. maltodextrin, hydrogenated, isolate, hydrolysed, artificial flavours, emulsifiers, or E-numbers
- Ingredients not readily available in a home kitchen
- Bright, attractive packaging
- Shelf-stable foods (foods that can be stored safely at room temperature for long periods without refrigeration due to processing) often with excessive packaging such as boxes, plastic wrappers, or sealed containers

## WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE WAY WE EAT?

Life today is busy and fast-paced. Many people no longer have the time, or feel they do not have the time, to prepare homemade meals from scratch as people did in the past.

We are slowly moving away from traditional recipes and home-cooked meals prepared by our parents and grandparents using simple, natural ingredients. Instead, we rely more on ready-to-eat meals, packaged snacks, sugar-sweetened drinks and fast food because they are quick and convenient. These foods are often ultra-processed.

## REMEMBER: SMALL CHANGES CAN LEAD TO BIG HEALTH WINS!



Below is a table explaining how foods are classified based on their level of processing. It is advisable to eat more unprocessed or minimally processed foods, and fewer ultra-processed foods.

### UNDERSTANDING ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS (NOVA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM)

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<b>Group 1</b> Unprocessed or Minimally Processed Foods	Fresh or slightly altered foods with no added ingredients. These foods may be frozen, dried, or cooked to make them last longer or easier to use.	Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, grains (like rice or oats), flour, pasta, milk, meat, eggs, nuts
<b>Group 2</b> Processed Cooking Ingredients	Ingredients made from Group 1 foods or natural sources. Used to season or cook meals.	Oil, butter, sugar, salt, honey
<b>Group 3</b> Processed Foods	Group 1 foods with added Group 2 ingredients (like salt, sugar, or oil). These foods are often preserved through canning or fermentation.	Canned vegetables, cheese, bread, ham, smoked fish
<b>Group 4</b> Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)	Products made mostly from cheap food extracts (such as corn syrup or protein powders) with little or no whole food. They often include additives like flavours or colours and are typically ready-to-eat.	Soft drinks, packaged snacks, instant noodles, sugary breakfast cereals, processed meats, ready meals