

## Processed Foods

### What is food processing?



Take a tomato, as soon as you chop it, it has undergone a form of processing. Add a couple more steps and produce tomato soup or canned tomatoes. Add a few ingredients and bottle a tomato sauce that can sit safely in your pantry for months until you are ready to use it.

**Food processing is any method used to turn agricultural produce and ingredients into edible, safe and nutritious food and drink products.** This can involve one or more processes including mixing, milling, cooking, chopping, juicing, heating, smoking, curing, maturing, drying, marinating, packaging and many more.

During food processing, manufacturers process foods in many ways; for example add ingredients to enhance flavour, improve texture and extend shelf life.

The nutritional quality of the food can also be improved by adding vitamins and minerals, reformulating or simply developing new innovative nutritious products.

## The benefits of food processing

### Food safety

**Perhaps the most unsung benefit of food processing is delivering food that is safe.**

Examples include:

- » Pasteurisation and other heat treatment processes help to remove harmful pathogens that cause illness.
- » Removing certain natural toxins such as aflatoxins found on agricultural crops, eg. corn and peanuts.
- » Heating, Refrigerating and freezing can eliminate, decrease or slow microbial growth to help keep foods safe and able to be stored for longer.
- » Limiting the production of acrylamide, that forms on certain foods during baking. This can be done by adjusting cooking conditions.



## Nutrition

**Food processing can help provide food that is safe and for specific dietary needs.**

### Meeting dietary requirements

- » Food manufacturers can reformulate existing products to reduce salt, sugars and fat (e.g. saturated, and trans-fat), or reduce the serving size to lower energy intake.
- » Examples of reformulated foods and drinks are reduced-fat dairy products including milk, cheese and yoghurts; and low and no-sugar drinks.
- » Whether there is a need for less sugar, sodium or fat in the diet or a lifestyle choice that calls for additional protein, vegan, vegetarian, or other dietary need or choice, processed foods can be manufactured to increase the options available for consumers.
- » The food industry brings to market foods and drinks that meet consumer needs.

### Improve core food consumption

- » Around the world, dietary guidelines recommend a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, nuts and legumes, and whole grains along with dairy and protein rich foods. However, current dietary survey data indicates that most populations are not achieving recommended amounts.
- » Food processing enables a wide range of foods to be available to the general population, in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines to enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five groups every day. Processed foods such as cans and frozen can be more accessible when fresh food is hard to access due to location, cost and availability.

### Specialised foods

Many food and drink manufacturers work to create specialised nutrition products to support people with specific needs.

#### Examples include:

- » Foods for people with allergies and intolerances such as people with coeliac disease who require a gluten free diet
- » Infant formula and specialised formulas
- » Weight management products that can deliver nutrients while limiting energy intake
- » Sport food and drinks to support the training and recovery goals of athletes and sports people
- » Specialised nutritional products for medical purposes to meet specific needs of people to aid recovery and management of serious illness

### Fortification

- » Fortified foods and drinks are those to which vitamins and minerals are added to support health and wellbeing. For example, bread flours are fortified with thiamin and folic acid, while iodised salt is added to bread during manufacture to address community deficiencies in these nutrients.

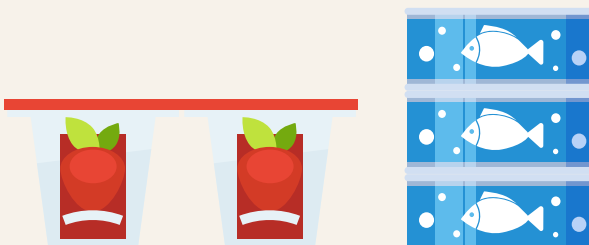
### Fortified foods in developing countries

**In developing countries, fortification can be critical in diets that are low in nutrients.**

The World Health Organization recognises fortification as a cost-effective strategy to reduce micronutrient inadequacy.

#### Example:

Vitamin A is the leading cause of preventable blindness and stunted growth in children under five years old. Food manufacturers therefore fortify flour, milk and dairy products and plant-based margarine spreads.



## Convenience and access

### Why are foods processed?

#### Affordable nutrition

Processed foods can provide affordable and nutritious options for consumers.

Processing enables foods to be transported to and stored at remote, rural or isolated communities where fresh produce may not be available or affordable.

Examples include frozen fruits and vegetables which are picked and processed seasonally, and available year-round due to the long shelf life.

With the recent rising prices of fresh produce, processed produce can be more cost effective.

#### Processing saves time

Processed foods offer convenience.

For example: Food manufacturers mill, cook, shape and toast grains to make breakfast cereals; fillet fish, add breading and make fish oven ready; mix, shape and dry pasta; soak, boil, drain, and then prepare legumes; ferment milk and add fruit to flavoured yoghurt; dry herbs & spices; refine sugar; prepare sauces and stocks that people can cook or combine with core foods to make meals.

#### Processing provides access, variety and enjoyment

Food processing gives consumers the option to choose from a diverse offering of food and drinks from around the world, at any time of year.

For example, without processing, cocoa grown in Ghana cannot be transformed into chocolate or coffee beans from Colombia to be available in Australia.

Processing also provides convenience to people who are unable to prepare foods from scratch themselves, giving them freedom to still prepare meals and enjoy foods.

## Processing for our environment

**Growing, manufacturing, transporting, and eating foods and drinks has a significant impact on our planet. Food innovation can lessen the load on the environment. Examples include:**

### Increased shelf life to reduce food waste

- » The food industry is innovating to ensure food lasts longer on our shelves in the amounts and forms that we need, adding convenience, safety and reducing waste at home.
- » Examples include: Canned, dried and frozen fruit and vegetables provide consumers with highly nutritious foods that will not rot or spoil in the short term and are available all year round.

### Access and food security

- » Food and drink are a fundamental part of life, but sometimes people are unable to access what they need. Processed food and drink products are an essential part of global food and nutrition security.

### Using imperfect foods and by-products

- » Consumers, supermarkets, chefs and food processors are making use of foods that may previously have gone to waste – taking advantage of ugly fruit and vegetables and using every part of the foodstuff, from peels to seeds and leaves, and developing them into a new product.
- » The priority for by-products should always be food or feed, and food manufacturers are responding by exploring options to aim for zero waste.



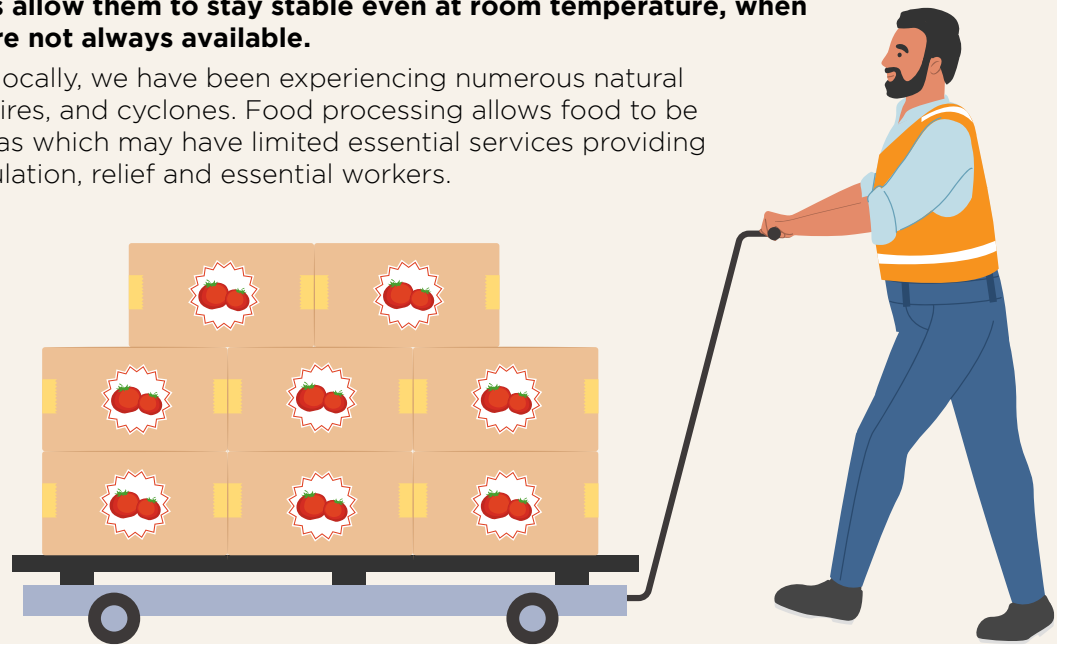
## Processing for food and nutrition safety

### In times of crisis

**When food is in short supply, emergency food aid is necessary and the food industry steps up. Processing of some foods allow them to stay stable even at room temperature, when refrigerated conditions are not always available.**

To take a recent example, locally, we have been experiencing numerous natural disasters e.g. floods, bushfires, and cyclones. Food processing allows food to be transported into these areas which may have limited essential services providing food and nutrition to population, relief and essential workers.

In addition, climate change will continue to disrupt our weather systems with drought, fire, floods and other disasters likely to affect the global food system. In this context, processing and storing foods will be important to reduce the risk of hunger and malnutrition in vulnerable locations.



### To deliver our staple foods

Many foods from the five food groups undergo a level of processing, for example, milling of flour, pasteurisation of dairy foods.



### Processing for jobs

The food industry is an essential pillar of food systems and economies around the world. Food manufacturing also provides a market for farmers and boosts local rural economies.

# Key Messages on the ‘Ultra-Processed Foods’ Terminology and Science

## ‘Ultra-processed food’ classification lacks scientific consensus

- » **NOVA** is a widely referenced food classification system that classifies a food based on its level of processing.
- » There is no global consensus on the definition of the term ‘ultra-processed food’, which makes the use of the term ambiguous.
- » Ultra-processed foods classification is not supported from a technical or nutrition perspective.
- » It contradicts the established evaluation of foods based on nutrient composition.
- » A key criticism of NOVA, and other classification systems based on the level of processing, is that nutrient content is ignored. There is no proven correlation with processing and nutrient value.
- » The term ‘Ultra-processed foods’ is not supported as the basis for food policy development such as dietary guideline recommendations.

## Nutritional composition of a food or drink matters in a healthy diet, not the level of processing

- » **There is no correlation between the nutrient value of a food and level of processing. ‘More processed’ does not mean ‘less healthy’.**
- » Some processed foods can be high in energy/kilojoules, fat, salt or sugar, or low in dietary fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals. These foods are likely to be discretionary foods and should be consumed infrequently.
- » Some foods classified as ‘ultra-processed foods’ are nutritious including wholemeal bread, yoghurt and dairy foods, vegetable soup, and pasta sauces – all of which can be a part of a healthy, balanced diet.
- » Consumers are encouraged to choose foods that can be part of a balanced diet, considering the nutritional quality of the food, portion size, and frequency of consumption.



**Place research and evidence first. Science linking ‘Ultra-processed food’ consumption to health impacts is unclear. It is important that the debate on NOVA is science-based. The food industry continues to support research.**