

The Three Evils of Processed Food

For the vast majority of Canadians, packaged foods are a part of everyday life. Cereal from a box for breakfast...canned soup for lunch...and instant rice for dinner...Even many of our “healthy choices come from a package.

The problem with packaged foods, is that they usually contain a lot of things we don't need (like sugars, fats, and salt), and very little of the things that we do.

To start the process of from a SAD diet (Standard America Diet) to a whole foods diet, I suggest that you go through your cupboards, pantries and refrigerator and get rid of any foods that contain the work food additive offenders: High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS), artificial sweeteners, and trans fats.

High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS):

High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is corn syrup that has undergone enzymatic processing to convert its glucose into fructose and has then been mixed with pure corn syrup (100% glucose) to produce a desired sweetness. This sweetener is most prevalent in sodas, syrups, fruit juices and numerous other items such as bread, soup mixes, cereals, pasta sauces, barbecue sauces and honey. Even products that are labeled “Naturally Sweetened,” “100% Natural Flavors,” or “All Natural” may contain it!

Diets high in HFCS are associated with obesity, insulin resistance, type II diabetes, fatty liver disease and high triglycerides. In addition, consuming even low amounts of HFCS may increase appetite due to its effect on suppressing the hormone Leptin. Leptin is responsible for giving us the feeling of fullness. HFCS also contains trace amounts of mercury.

Instead of high fructose corn syrup, try to find products that are sweetened with the following: date sugar, barley malt, agave syrup, fruit juice, rice syrup, honey, maple syrup, stevia or Sucanat® (sugar cane molasses).

Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners are used in processed foods in the place of sugar. They may be used to reduce the number of calories in the product (i.e. “diet” food) or simply because they are often cheaper than more natural alternatives. The most frequently used artificial sweeteners are Splenda (sucralose), Aspartame, Saccharine, and Acesulfame Potassium (acesulfame K).

Some of the most common side effects associated with these products are headaches, dizziness and diarrhea. Splenda has also been found to significantly reduce the numbers of healthy bacteria in the digestive system. In addition to this, animal studies have indicated that artificial sweeteners can cause body weight gain. The sweet taste of the product induces an insulin response, which causes a reduction in blood sugar and the

storage of sugars as fat. Because artificial sweeteners do not actually cause an increase in blood sugar, the overall result is hypoglycemia, and increased food intake the next time there is a meal. After a while, rats given sweeteners have steadily increased calorie intake, increased body weight, and increased adiposity (fatness). Furthermore, the natural responses to eating sugary foods (eating less at the next meal and using some of the extra calories to warm the body after the sugary meal) are gradually lost.

If you are looking for a natural low calorie sugar replacement, try stevia or xyletol.

Trans Fats

Trans fat is the common name for “unsaturated fat with *trans*-isomer fatty acids” (you can see why they shorten it!). The names “*cis*” and “*trans*” describe the shape of the fat molecules. Most fats found in nature are in the *cis* form. The process of hydrogenation (such as that used in the production of margarine) changes many of the *cis* fats into trans fats.

Now this may not seem like a big deal, but when the body tries to use these *trans* fats, they are the wrong shape and do not function the same way. It is like trying force a puzzle piece in the wrong spot.

The consumption of trans fats increase the risk of coronary heart disease by raising levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and lowering levels of HDL (good) cholesterol

So steer clear of hydrogenated, partially hydrogenated and trans fats and switch to cold pressed vegetable oils, such as olive or sunflower or coconut.