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Don’t fall for the latest trendy food claims

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Every day, it seems like there’s new information on what to eat and what not to eat.

If you find it hard to keep up, you’re not alone. And by knowing what to look for, you can be better informed and set yourself up to make healthy eating choices.

Consider the grocery aisle, with its endless claims of health and wellness in bold lettering on food packages. The packaging can be eye-catching, drawing you in with their promises and maybe even motivating you to pay a higher price. But the truth is, many of these items may be ultra-processed foods, rebranded to fit the latest

trends and appeal to our desire to eat healthier. Often, these food trends may not be based on nutritional science.

What exactly are ultra-processed foods? Typically, these are foods that include:

- Ingredients not available in retail outlets
- Additives, colors, and flavors not found in whole foods
- Artificial ingredients and preservatives intended to imitate unprocessed foods

Common examples of ultra-processed foods include:

- Soft drinks
- Hot dogs and cold cuts
- Breakfast cereals
- Store-bought cookies, cakes, and other desserts
- Frozen meals

Studies have shown that ultra-processed foods may be bad for our health, and eating too much of them is associated with a range of conditions.

For those living with cancer, food choices can be especially important. Since many people with cancer experience changes in their appetite and body weight, being mindful about food choices matters. Eating a balanced diet may help manage side effects, boost energy, reduce inflammation, and increase muscle tone.

Here are five **Microsteps** — small, science-backed steps that you can consider taking to get you started making healthier food choices. As always, consult your care team to get recommendations that are best for you. This is especially important because some foods can interact with certain medications and impact side effects.

Reading the labels.

Minimally processed and whole foods don’t need health claims. If a particular claim gets your attention, read the ingredients before adding it to your cart. Many foods are loaded with sugar, even though they’re labeled as healthy. A glance at the label will quickly boost your awareness so you can buy a different brand or swap it for a healthier version. One good tip is to look for the amount of added sugars under the carbohydrates section of the label. Another is to count the ingredients: ultra-processed foods tend to have five or more ingredients, including artificial colors, preservatives and sweeteners.

Spending some time in the outer aisles of the grocery store.

At many grocery stores, fresher and healthier foods can be found on the outer perimeter of the store, while more processed foods are often found in the center aisles.

Finding a go-to healthy snack you love and making sure you regularly have it stocked.

Snacks are often ultra-processed. Examples of less processed snacks include a homemade mix of nuts and seeds; veggies like carrot sticks, bell pepper or cucumber with a dipping sauce like hummus or nut butter; or plain Greek yogurt with berries.

Swapping one sugary (or diet) beverage a day with fruit-infused or sparkling water.

Sodas and other sugary drinks may include added sugars or artificial sweeteners. By cutting back on these, you can reduce your sugar intake and better hydrate your body.

Choosing minimally-processed foods.

When possible, aim to consume more minimally-processed foods, like fruits and vegetables (including frozen), eggs, fresh meat, milk, plain yogurt, legumes, nuts and seeds – rather than more ultra-processed foods, like soda, packaged snacks, fast food, cold cuts and store-bought bread. Try to add as many whole foods into your day, like some blueberries instead of fruit or vegetable juice.

So much about living with cancer is individual, and your food choices are no exception. Consult your care team to get guidance and personalized recommendations based on your experience and what’s best for you.

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