There are two main forms of food processing which transform fresh food into a variety of new products. Processing foods helps to extend the shelf life and reduce waste by making food safer and more nutrient-dense, and it is a critical industry that ensures our food system is sustainable and resilient.

However, it is important to note that food processing can sometimes lead to health risks, such as the introduction of harmful chemicals, the removal of essential nutrients, and the creation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the potential risks associated with food processing and to make informed choices about the foods we eat.

Moreover, there are other forms of food processing which in recent decades have seen its products thriving off the heels and taking the consumer market by storm. Ultra-processing, which manufactures products such as soft drinks, biscuits, chips, ready meals, suppers, freeze-pizza and more, becomes convenient and widely enjoyed by consumers all around the world.

Unfortunately, the way these processed foods are marketed could be of concern for our body. They usually contain polysaccharide ingredients (such as corn, oils, sugars, and sweeteners) with chemical food additives (such as artificial flavors, emulsifiers, and food-grade salts) and undergo multiple industrial-scale processing procedures before being ready for consumption.

These contribute to a poor nutritional profile which impacts consumers’ lifestyle of disease stress such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and more. But, this doesn’t mean our access to processed food should be avoided. Instead, we can still gain many health benefits from these foods by understanding their nutrition and making informed choices about what we eat.

In fact, it can be a great time-saver for the busy dietician. Instead of tediously counting all the nutrition facts and serving sizes on processed food products, which we often refer to as “guilty pleasures” or “snack food”, we can use this information to identify foods that contain the healthiest ingredients and the most nutritional value.

The healthiest alternatives to high-calorie, low-nutrient foods include foods that are low in fat, refined sugars, and processed carbohydrates. These include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.

Understanding the food labels on processed food products can help us make better judgments of our food choices and improve our overall health. The Nutrition Facts on these products can give us insight into the calorie content, fat, sugar, and sodium levels. This information can help us make informed decisions about what we eat and how much we consume.

For instance, choosing a low-calorie, low-sugar alternative to a high-calorie, high-sugar snack can help us maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers. Similarly, choosing a high-fiber, low-sodium option can help us maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.

At the end of the day, it’s all about making informed choices about what we eat. While it may seem daunting to navigate the world of processed foods, with the right knowledge and tools, we can make healthier choices and improve our overall health.

The key to eating right is in moderation. Ultimately, it is up to you to decide what you want to eat. Processed foods can be a part of a healthy diet, but it’s important to be mindful of your intake and make sure to include a variety of whole, nutrient-dense foods. If you have any questions or concerns about processed foods, please don’t hesitate to reach out to a healthcare professional or a registered dietitian for guidance.

Start your journey towards better health today and make informed choices about the food you eat. Your body will thank you for it!