

## Clean Food

Have you heard about “clean food” and wondered if your food is “clean?” Increasingly, magazines, television shows, and social media are touting the importance of clean food. But what does that mean, and why should this matter to you and your family? Check out some strategies and tips for selecting and consuming clean foods and beverages below. Don’t worry, moving toward clean foods isn’t hard, it just may require you to think a bit more about foods you put into your body, read labels a bit more intensely, and allow a tiny bit more time for planning meals and snacks!

***So, just what is “clean food?”*** Clean food is food that has not been altered much from how it originated in nature—it has been grown, produced and processed in ways that are as natural as possible, without tons of chemical-based fertilizers and/or pesticides, added colors, preservatives or other additives. Based on this definition, many would agree that most of the food and beverage items found in our grocery and corner stores would *not* fall into the category of “clean food.”

So in reality, what are we to do if our goal is to include as much clean food as possible into our daily meals and snacks and drinks? We can begin a clean food journey by being on the lookout for characteristics of foods and beverages that would make them less-clean, and start removing these from our grocery lists, kitchens, and our plates.

Eating clean foods is not always easy, especially with junk foods tempting us at every turn, but you can start with small steps.



## Simple Strategies for Moving Toward a “Clean Food”

### Approach

**Overall, limit the amount of ultra-processed foods you select, and consume.** In a “clean food” approach, think about minimizing the amount of ultra-processed foods you consume (pre-packaged meals, frozen dinners, etc.). Ultra-processing often strips away natural nutrients (fiber for example), and adds in unnatural, laboratory-created chemicals. Minimal processing, such as processing oats into quick-cook form, is much healthier than ultra-processing - check out the various levels of processing of an apple to the right for an example!

### **Limit foods and beverages with additives including**

**dyes/colors, flavorings, stabilizers, preservatives, etc.** Most of us have heard about the need to limit the amount of chemically-produced additives we consume. But it is very likely that you don’t even know you are consuming these additives! So in this clean food approach, be diligent, read ingredient lists and skip over items that include colors (like “FD&C Yellow No. 6”), flavors (“artificial flavors”), and stabilizers (“gums”), if possible.

**Limit foods and beverages with additives that may appear natural but nonetheless are unhealthy.** We often think of food dyes and flavorings when we think of “food additives,” but when thinking in a clean food way, we also need to consider limiting other additives that have a negative impact on our health! Think added sodium (heart disease trigger), sugar (obesity/diabetes trigger), fat (obesity trigger), and/or high fructose corn syrup (obesity/diabetes trigger), for example – limit these and you have cleaner food!

### Apples

1<sup>st</sup> choice (food in a natural state): Apple

2<sup>nd</sup> choice (somewhat [minimally] processed): Applesauce without added sugars or flavors

Limit (highly [ultra] processed): Apple toaster pastry

Shopping tip: While applesauce is a healthy choice, it has fewer nutrients than a whole apple!

Source: <https://www.prevention.com/food/healthy-eating-tips/23-ways-to-eat-clean/slide/2>

### Canned Tomatoes: Hidden Additives!

Have you thought about hidden additives in your everyday canned tomatoes? Watch out for chemical and “natural” additives in this popular food item! Canned tomatoes can come in many forms, “Italian style” for example, and more than you would think contain high fructose corn syrup! Many also include natural and artificial flavorings, some are high in sodium (unless you buy “low sodium” versions), and some include preservatives. So, read the labels on canned tomatoes, and all other processed foods you purchase, and aim for those with the fewest additives possible!

**Go for organic, if you can, when selecting certain fruits and vegetables.** Organic fruits and vegetables are more likely to be clean foods due to requirements for planting, tending, and harvesting if certified as organic. Foods in which you consume the skins, or outer layers, are those that would be the most ideal in organic form. Check out frozen versions of organic fruits and vegetables which often are a bit more affordable than fresh, and they last longer too!

## **The Take Away**

Go for clean foods - unprocessed or minimally-processed, if possible.

### **Examples of unprocessed foods:\***

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Dried legumes
- Nuts
- Farm-fresh eggs

### **Examples of minimally-processed foods:\***

- Unrefined grains, like whole wheat bread and pasta, popcorn, steel-cut oatmeal, quinoa, and brown rice
- Frozen fruits and vegetables (watch for additives)
- Unprocessed meat (uncured bacon for example); wild over pastured meat, pastured over grain-fed meat
- Hormone-free dairy and meats
- Oils



### **Dirty 12**

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) reports on “cleanliness” of produce. They published the Dirty 12- consider organic versions of: strawberries, spinach, nectarines, apples, peaches, pears, cherries, grapes, celery, tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, and potatoes. You can get a credit card-sized card of the Dirty 12 and Clean 15 from their website.

Source:

<https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/index.php#.Wp7us-gbPD4>

Finally, it is important to note that eating “clean food” doesn't give you free reign to eat endless quantities. They may be healthier foods/beverages, but they still have calories!\*

\*Adapted from: <https://www.fitnessmagazine.com/weight-loss/plans/diets/clean-eating/?page=6>