



Human Optimization

Pod Club Discussion Questions



E13 Unwrapping the Truth About Processed Foods: Impact on Your Health and How to Overcome the Temptation

Guest: Katherine A. Zeratsky, RDN, LD, Assistant Professor of Nutrition, Registered Dietitian | Mayo Clinic – Rochester, MN

The three big questions explored in the podcast:

Question 1

What exactly are processed foods and why do they matter so much to our overall health?

Question 2

Why do so many of us rely on processed foods despite the known downsides?

Question 3

What are the practical steps we should take right now to minimize processed foods in our diets?

Discussion Questions:

1. Kate Zeratsky defines processed foods as anything altered from its original state, existing on a spectrum from minimally to ultra-processed. Where do you think most of the foods you consume fall on this spectrum? Where might you turn to find more information about the foods you eat?
2. The podcast highlights that ultra-processed foods often have nutrients removed and additives (sugars, salts, chemicals) added. When you look at food labels, which of these items do you prioritize? What steps will you take to look for "what's missing" and "what's added" to modify your choices?
3. Taste, convenience, and affordability are cited as major reasons people rely on processed foods. Which of these factors is the biggest driver for your own food choices? Discuss potential workarounds for that with your group (i.e. how can you get similar benefits of being tasty, convenient, and affordable with less processed food options).
4. As discussed during this episode, processed foods can change our palate and desire for certain tastes. In what ways have your food preferences shifted over time?
5. Kate offers the strategy of "simple adds" – incorporating fruits, vegetables, or protein-rich foods to meals, even if some processed ingredients are present. How could you apply this "add-in" approach to one of your regular meals or snacks to increase its nutritional value without completely overhauling it?

6. The challenge described in this episode suggests pre-deciding your snacks or restaurant meals. How often do you currently plan your food choices in advance? What changes can you make to be more intentional about pre-planning?
7. The episode emphasizes that improving your diet is a process, not an all-or-nothing endeavor, and that patience and self-forgiveness are key. How can you adopt a more forgiving and iterative approach to making lasting changes? How can you develop “process satisfaction” so that you start to enjoy and celebrate the process rather than delaying gratification until you reach your end goal?
8. Based on this episode, what is one small change you are going to make to help improve in this area. How are you going to keep yourself accountable to that and measure your success? (Be sure to keep it simple, start small, and make it very clear).