### What is a Processed Food?

#### Unprocessed Foods:
These foods are fresh or raw foods that do not undergo any changes from their plant or animal sources when eaten other than the outer cover being removed. Examples include: raw fruits, vegetables, nuts.

#### Minimally Processed Foods:
These foods are raw foods that are slightly changed from their original form into one that is more usable or available (most commonly by simply heating them up!). These foods retain most of their nutrients but can spoil quickly. Examples include: whole wheat bread, natural peanut butter, boiled eggs, baked potatoes.

#### Highly Processed Foods:
These are foods that undergo considerable change from their original form. These foods are generally quickly prepared but may lose nutrients in processing and often contain chemical additives. Sometimes the additives are preservatives to prevent the item from spoiling, and sometimes they are added vitamins and minerals. Examples include: enriched white bread, pies, cured meats, and most food in packaging.

### Some Tips on Identifying Processed Foods:

- **Know your ingredients:** When buying packaged foods, read the list of ingredients—the shorter the list the better. You should be able to know and visualize exactly what you’re reading. If you’re holding a box of corn bread mix that includes sodium acid pyrophosphate, egg yolk poser, or monocalcium phosphate in its ingredients—this is a red flag that this may not be good for you.

- **Understand ingredient order:** The FDA requires manufacturers to state ingredients that make up 5% of the total recipe. This means that there may be other ingredients in the package that are not listed.

- **Know your food’s original source:** The more a food has changed from its original form, the more it is processed. High fructose corn starch is found in many of the foods we eat and drink such as soda. It is derived from corn kernels—after soaking them in water-->heating-->washing the starch. This process changes the corn’s appearance significantly and washes away nutrients and minerals. This is a highly processed food.
If we start with corn in its natural state (unprocessed) and follow it through the stages of food processing, here are the different categories these products fall into and why, as well as the types of finished products we may see.

### STAGES OF FOOD PROCESSING:

**UNPROCESSED**

Corn in its most natural state is considered unprocessed; completely unchanged.

**MINIMALLY PROCESSED**

These corn puffs have one ingredient with only air added, making it a minimally processed food.

**MINIMAL-HIGLY PROCESSED**

These taco shells are considered minimally to highly processed because the corn has been changed from its original state by being ground into flour but it has also been fried in coconut oil. All five ingredients are recognizable.

**HIGLYY PROCESSED**

This bag of cornbread mix is considered a highly processed product because the corn has been changed from its original state by being ground into a flour and there are many ingredients including preservatives that are difficult to pronounce and are even unrecognizable.

**HIGLYY PROCESSED**

This can of cola is considered highly processed because the corn has been drastically changed from its original state by being ground up first and refined to separate the corn kernels from the corn starch, and then cooked in an acid solution to turn into high fructose corn syrup. There are also several other processed ingredients.