



If a food is “natural” or made from scratch, it doesn’t mean it’s automatically good for you.

“Natural” doesn’t always mean healthy. Sugar, butter, and even certain plant toxins occur naturally, yet too much of them can be harmful. In many countries, the word “natural” on packaging has no strict legal definition, so its meaning can be vague and open to interpretation. Over time, our idea of what counts as “natural” has shifted, often shaped by current trends in health and cleanliness. For example, additives are often grouped under “non-natural” ingredients, yet many people following “natural” or “clean” diets take vitamins or supplements in pill form that are produced through similar extraction and processing methods. Additives (having e.g. E-numbers in Europe) can be flours from seeds like locust bean gum, guar gum or tara gum thickeners. These shifting definitions remind us that “natural” is more a matter of perception than a guarantee of healthfulness.

Cooking at home gives control over ingredients, but it doesn’t guarantee healthier results. The nutritional value of a food depends on its ingredients, not just where it comes from or how it’s labelled. Homemade food isn’t automatically better for you than processed food. A cake made at home with lots of sugar and butter still contains high amounts of sugar and saturated fat, which have been linked to an increased risk of non-communicable diseases. Some industrially processed foods are carefully designed to improve nutrition lowering salt, sugar, and saturated fat compared with traditional recipes, or adding vitamins and minerals, and controlled for possible contamination. Safe, long-lasting options such as pasteurised milk or frozen vegetables can offer benefits that are hard to replicate consistently at home.

Healthfulness comes from the food’s nutrient profile, portion size, and balance within your overall diet, not just from being “so-called natural” or homemade. Instead of relying on the label “natural” as a shortcut, look at the ingredients and nutritional information. The healthiest approach often combines both worlds: fresh, homemade meals alongside nutrient-rich processed options such as canned beans, fortified cereals, and frozen vegetables.

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