

Abstract

“Everything Is Processed!” – Active Older Adult’s Perceptions of Processed Foods [†]

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Older adults in New Zealand grew up in a society where food was prepared and consumed at home. The unprecedented change to food environments over the past 50 years means they are now living in a climate of highly processed foods and out-of-home eating establishments. NZ dietary guidelines recommend the consumption of whole or less processed foods. This pilot study investigated New Zealand active older adult’s perceptions of processed foods.

A total of 27 active older adults, aged from 67–82 years who are members of the AUT Never 2 Old physical activity program were recruited from 4 sites in Auckland, New Zealand, and participated in 4 focus groups. A qualitative descriptive methodology was followed, with data analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings from the focus groups showed older adults perceive that processed foods are everywhere, are easily accessible and hard to avoid. Although various levels of food processing were recognized, confusion was widespread over the implications of these levels and which processed foods they should be choosing for optimal health. Identification of highly processed foods is by noting numerous unfamiliar ingredients on a food package. Participants perceived that these foods are less healthy and desirable than foods they cooked themselves. They use processed foods as a complement in their food preparation, and saw no need for their use while they are physically capable, but saw convenience, living alone and health issues as reasons they may adopt their use in future years.

Although these active adults report consuming low amounts of highly processed foods, there is confusion over the implications of the level of processing of foods. Future research is needed to explore the perceptions, and use, of processed foods in the diverse New Zealand older adult population.



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