

October Unprocessed 2013:
THE OFFICIAL GUIDE



Sponsored By



by Andrew Wilder of Eating Rules and
Stacy Spensley of Center Stage Wellness
Updated for 2013 by Suzanne Elizondo

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2013 October Unprocessed Challenge from EatingRules.com! Thank you so much for being here and taking part in this event.

This is the fourth official event and we hope it will be the biggest and best yet. Our goal is to get as many people as possible eating as little processed food as possible for the entire month of October (and hopefully beyond).

There is a lot of information and community support at Eating Rules throughout the month of October, but in years past, some people new to this way of eating have felt overwhelmed at the start. We hope this guide will give you the tools you need to feel (and be!) successful with the challenge.

In this guide, you'll find:

- The history and basic definitions of October Unprocessed
- How to get the most out of the challenge, including common speed bumps and how to overcome them
- How to read labels and stock and unprocessed pantry
- Tips and recommended tools
- Suggestions on dealing with dietary considerations
- How to continue the challenge beyond October

Where to find more information throughout the challenge:

- EatingRules.com
- On Twitter, using the hashtag #unprocessed
- The [Eating Rules Facebook page](#)
- The [October Unprocessed Facebook Group](#)

Thank you for joining us! Please share your experiences.

GETTING STARTED

THE OCTOBER UNPROCESSED STORY

In October of 2009, Andrew was struck by a simple idea:

“What would happen if I went for an entire month without eating any processed foods?”

This question would have been laughable (rather, nonsensical) just a few decades ago. Nowadays, it seems that almost every food that comes with an ingredients list on it is likely to be laden with extra sugar, fat, and salt. And preservatives. And flavorings. And artificial colors.

Andrew wasn't okay with this.

So he tried it, along with a few good friends: A month of no processed foods:

“It was revelatory. My expectations and sense of taste were re-calibrated. I started to identify individual ingredients in the foods I ate. I didn't crave those salty snacks. I found myself often in the kitchen, excited to see what I could cook next. Above all, I simply felt better.”

“We took turns hosting small dinner parties, and shared our stories and experiences. It brought us closer together. Funny how real food does that.”

The next year, he decided to try it again, in a bigger way. He had started Eating Rules just a few months before, reached out to his fellow foodies, bloggers, and friends, and issued the challenge again. In October 2010, 415 people took the pledge and he shared over 40 guest posts. In October 2011, more than 3,000 people took the pledge, and he shared 55 guest posts! Last year, over 6,000 people took the pledge and he published a whopping 93 guest posts.

Our goal for 2013 is to inspire more than 10,000 people to sign the pledge, committing to eating no processed foods whatsoever during the month of October.

And then let's see what happens.

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FIRST STEPS

SET AN INTENTION

The best way to succeed in this challenge is to be clear about what you want to accomplish. If you already eat pretty well, maybe this month is the time to buckle down and toss those last few packages skulking around the pantry. If you aren't there yet, maybe cutting out high fructose corn syrup or just vending machine food is your first step. Or maybe Sunday dinners will be unprocessed, but the work week won't change much.

DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU. No matter what your goal, even if it's small, please join us and [take the pledge](#).

So, what's your intention? Write it here and make it official!

My intention for the October Unprocessed challenge is:

THE KITCHEN TEST DEFINITION

October UNPROCESSED. How do we define "Unprocessed?"

Obviously there's a wide range of implications in that word, and we will probably each define it slightly differently for ourselves. Andrew's definition is this:

Unprocessed food is any food that could be made by a person with reasonable skill in a home kitchen with whole-food ingredients.

We call it "The Kitchen Test." If you pick up something with a label (and if it doesn't *have* a label, it's probably unprocessed), and find an ingredient you'd never use in your kitchen and *couldn't* possibly make yourself from the whole form, it's processed.

It doesn't mean you actually *have* to make it yourself, it just means that for it to be considered "unprocessed" that you *could*, in theory, do so.

Andrew recently posted about the Kitchen Test, <http://www.eatingrules.com/2013/09/the-kitchen-test/> and we'll continue exploring it throughout the month.

Does that definition work for you? If not, what is your Definition of Unprocessed?

THE DELIBERATE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

What are your options if something doesn't pass the Kitchen Test?

1. Don't eat it. It's processed.
2. Consider adding a deliberate exception.

When Andrew first started this challenge, he and Matty (his now-husband) decided to exempt certain ingredients. For example, vital wheat gluten is extracted through an industrial process and fails the kitchen test. That said, they decided in advance that the benefit in adding a few tablespoons of vital wheat gluten to their homemade 100%whole grain bread outweighed the "harm" of using it.

Another example is a runner who has signed the pledge and is training for a marathon. For regular meals and snacks, she ate unprocessed. During training runs, she allowed herself sports drinks and gels that wouldn't pass the Kitchen Test. But the rest of the time, she ate completely unprocessed.

It's important to decide what your boundaries are BEFORE you get to them. The key to the deliberate exception clause is weighing the pros and cons of allowing a certain ingredient so you don't have to make it a test of willpower, potentially when you're hungry or under pressure.

What are your deliberate exceptions (if any) for the challenge?

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE CHALLENGE

THE TECHNICAL STUFF

SIGN THE PLEDGE: To officially participate in October Unprocessed, we ask that you take the pledge! This does not mean you WON'T eat any processed food during the month, it means you will strive to meet your own goal of eating unprocessed, whatever that may be.

Signing the pledge shows your commitment and adds your support to the thousands of other pledge-takers all working toward a similar goal.

CLICK HERE TO SIGN THE PLEDGE: <http://www.eatingrules.com/october-unprocessed-2013/>

GUEST POSTS: The key to this challenge is community, and food is not only fuel, but our culture and a part of how we socialize. No one can do this alone, and having the food blog community participate will enrich the experience for everyone with dozens of guest posts throughout the month of October. These bloggers and other experts bring their own unique view, skills, education, and personal challenges to the fold.

The most common feedback we received from the previous challenges was "More Recipes, Please!" -- so we'll be sharing at least one recipe every day (all have passed the Kitchen Test!). We'll also sprinkle in a few other posts on "D.I.Y.", specific ingredients, and other things to think about in the world of unprocessed.

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People come to the challenge from very different places, and we wanted it to be easier for everyone to get what they need. Not every post will resonate with everyone. In years past people have wanted more vegan recipes, fewer vegan recipes, more food policy, less food policy, more tips, fewer tricks, and everything in between. The goal is to cast a wide net and provide information that helps as many people as possible. Not interested in a certain post? Skip it! See if the next one helps you.

DON'T MISS A SINGLE POST:

Get posts by email (max. 1 email/ day): <http://feedburner.google.com/fb/a/mailverify?uri=eatingrules>

Click this link and enter your email address. You'll then receive an email with a verification link. You must click that link to activate your subscription!

OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

This year we've set up a Facebook group called "October Unprocessed 2013." It's free to join, and you can chime in with conversation about how the challenge is going for you - or share recipes, pictures, and other links with the group. The group will be moderated and supported primarily by **Suzanne Elizondo, MS, RD**, a high energy registered dietitian and health coach who specializes in nurturing mind/ body connections. Suzanne helped update this guide as well, and her bio is at the end of the document. Of course, Andrew will be stopping by to offer support and encouragement, too!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/octoberunprocessed2013/>

COMMON SPEED BUMPS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Every year of October Unprocessed reveals new challenges experienced by participants. The goal of the challenge is to motivate, educate, and inspire you, **not** to frustrate you, judge, or make anyone feel like they've failed. Here are some common areas where people get stuck –and what you can do to avoid or overcome them.

SPIRIT VS. SEMANTICS OF THE CHALLENGE

Start from where you are. If you don't think you can feasibly cut out all processed foods for a month, make your goal to reduce them, or to focus on a few ingredients (cutting out high fructose corn syrup and refined grains is a great start). Be clear about what you want to accomplish (we recommend setting an intention, above).

If you eat a piece of candy corn during the month, the world will not end. At its core, this challenge is an awareness exercise. It's not a punishment. Today wasn't the best? That's what tomorrow is for – you can always start again.

RESISTANCE FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Feeling "sabotaged" by family and friends is a common complaint, both for the challenge, and when people make any dietary changes. Know that for many people, they are operating from a place of fear:

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What if this changes you? They are simply holding on to what they know, and it is a reflection on them, not on you.

That said, it can be very frustrating. Here are some tips that can help:

- Encourage friends and family to take the pledge with you, and talk to members of your household to get them involved instead of trying to take this on yourself or deciding for everyone. Help them understand why you want to do this.
- Rely on outside resources. When all the information is coming from you and someone disagrees, it can feel personal. Some great resources are (**movies**) [Food, Inc.](#); [Forks Over Knives](#); [Fat, Sick & Nearly Dead](#); [Super Size Me](#); [King Corn](#); (**books**) [In Defense of Food](#) by Michael Pollan (the book that inspired October Unprocessed!); [Eat Naked](#) by Margaret Floyd; [Appetite for Profit](#) by Michele Simon; [The End of Overeating](#) by David Kessler; [Salt, Sugar, Fat](#) by Michael Moss; [Real Food: What to eat and why](#) by Nina Planck.
- Emphasize that the challenge is only for one month.
- Lead by example! Find a delicious new recipe and cook it for your family or friends (without pointing out that it's unprocessed before they eat it). There's probably no better way to convince someone than by serving them fantastic food that, oh yeah, it just happens to be unprocessed.
- Stay accountable and host or attend an Unprocessed Potluck (see below).

Where do you anticipate coming across resistance? What would help alleviate that?

ACCOUNTABILITY

No one will know if you stick to the challenge or not – unless you tell them. If you're feeling trepidation about it, find yourself support and accountability. If you're a blogger, blog about your experience. Recruit a friend to take the pledge with you and check in once a day or once a week (it also gives you a good excuse to chat with your friend!). Your buddy could be someone you know, or find another participant online.

Another good way to stay accountable is to stay active in the participating community: Leave comments with your successes and challenges on Eating Rules posts, [update the Facebook group](#), and use the #unprocessed hash tag on Twitter. We want you to succeed!

Who can support you in this challenge? Who could you invite to join you?

HOST A POTLUCK

Another fun way to get other people involved and to give yourself some social accountability is to hold an Unprocessed Potluck! Recruit some friends and family to join you and bring an unprocessed dish (it may help to agree on a definition for the event) to share. This could be a kick-off early on, a mid-point check in, or a celebratory closing feast. Be creative!

Who could you invite to a potluck? When in October would work best for you?

EATING OUT

Ah, the dangerous, additive-ridden gantlet of the restaurant. What to do? It's easy to say "Just eat in! If you cook it, you know what's in it." Many people do this, and kudos to them!

For those of you who have lunch meetings or work dinners or just love not having to do the dishes, here are some tips.

1. Check out the [swath of posts on eating out at Eating Rules](#).
2. Look up restaurants ahead of time when possible. Chains are required to post nutrition information, and most larger establishments will have detailed information for your perusal. Knowledge is power!
3. Patronize restaurants with farm-to-table menus or who make everything in-house. This is easier if you live in California, we know.
4. Choose dishes with easily-identified ingredients.
5. If ingredients are mysterious, ask, or substitute! If they don't make their own salad dressing, request olive oil and lemon juice.
6. Don't worry too much. Do your best and stick to the challenge at home.

Which local restaurants are most likely to serve unprocessed food? Where do you currently eat that may not make the cut?

TIME MANAGEMENT

The easiest way to ensure you're eating unprocessed food is to cook at home. That said, if you don't already cook at home a lot, that can be a big change and a major speed bump on the road to unprocessed eating.

Here are some of the best ways to make the most of your time when eating unprocessed. We go into more details later in this guide.

1. Have a well-stocked pantry of unprocessed ingredients. This doesn't just mean dried staples in the cupboard, but also frozen and fresh foods. There is a large section on stocking your pantry below.
2. Plan your meals. Menu planning can make a huge difference, especially when you're hungry. Menu planning resources are located below.
3. Have a stock of unprocessed snacks, just in case. It's harder to think and easier to grab something convenient when you're hungry.
4. Prep ingredients ahead of time or cook in batches. Fall foods are great for freezing (soup, this means you).
5. Get out the slow cooker! Dinner is done when you come home from work.

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If this is an area you struggle with, set aside some time in your calendar to do the planning each week. Maybe it's Sunday morning before you grocery shop, or Thursday before you pick up your CSA share. Taking half an hour to plan today can save you hours during the week.

Where do you struggle now with food and time management? Which tips could help you?

READING LABELS

The most important skill in becoming an Unprocessed detective is reading labels. The easiest way to do this is to buy food that doesn't HAVE labels like fresh fruits and vegetables. Once you get into grains, dairy, meat, and snack foods, it's time to get out your magnifying glass. Even the bulk bins have ingredient lists, so don't assume that everything in there is safe.

All that nutrition info on the label? You don't need it. You can skip straight to the ingredients list for this. Ask the following questions:

- Can I identify all the ingredients on the list?
- Can I pronounce them?
- If I can't pronounce it, is it the scientific name of a real ingredient?
- Is it a "whole" food or real ingredient?

If YES, it's good to go. If NO to any of these, it's processed.

At the end of this guide is an appendix of frequently-asked-about foods and ingredients, so if you're not sure, check there.

A note on organics and natural foods: The term "natural" is not regulated. You could mix up arsenic and concrete and slap a "natural" label on it, no problem. Never trust the claims on the front of a package, always flip it over and consult the ingredient list.

"Organic" is a term that is actually regulated and means that ingredients were grown in accordance with organic practices, without certain synthetic pesticides. That does not mean that the product is unprocessed, however. Organic white flour is still white flour and organic cookies are still cookies. That said, an organic apple and a conventionally-grown apple are both unprocessed –and deliciously in season.

TIPS AND TRICKS

PACKING UNPROCESSED LUNCHES FOR ADULTS

Weekday lunches can be a challenge, especially if you work a traditional 9-5 job. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Bring leftovers. Make extra servings of dinner and pack it up for work the next day. Soups are a great option this time of year and they freeze well so you don't have to eat them two or three days in a row. Wait a week!

Build a salad bar in your fridge. Prep ingredients over the weekend and mix-n-match a small salad throughout the week. Make your own salad dressing (you could even store the dressing at work, with or without a fridge). And yes, you can buy bags of pre-washed greens to make it easier!

Break out of a sandwich rut and have a meze meal. Bring fruit, cheese, bread, olives, and veggies instead of one main item.

Cook in bulk, then mix-n-match. For example, at the start of the week make a pot of beans, a pot of rice or quinoa, and chop your veggies. Now you have the basics makings for a whole-grain salad, a green salad with toppings, a burrito, and veggie burgers. You can also freeze the grains and beans.

Bring a (sweet) potato. If you have a microwave at work, bring a whole baking or sweet potato, stab it with a fork (especially satisfying on stressful days), and zap it for about 6 minutes. Bring a small container of toppings of your choice *et voila*, lunch.

If you normally bring a sandwich, go for whole grain bread and skip the processed deli meat. Instead of a bag of chips or crackers, bring fresh fruit or veggies.

Make sure you're drinking lots of water. If you hit the 3:00 slump, it may be a sign of dehydration – headache, fatigue, and hunger are all symptoms. Skip the vending machine or coffee shop and drink water first.

PACKING UNPROCESSED LUNCHES FOR KIDS

Neither of us has kids, so we admit that this is not an area of expertise for us. We'll have some guest posts from parents, however, and will add to these ideas as the month goes on. Please leave your suggestions and comments, too, and the guide will get even better!

Here is a great guest post from the 2011 challenge with ten unprocessed school lunch ideas:
<http://www.eatingrules.com/2011/10/unprocessed-school-lunch-ideas/>

Many of the tips from packing lunches for adults work here, too. If you usually include snacks as sides, see the "UNPROCESSED SNACKS" section next for more ideas.

- If you're sending PB&J, use unprocessed nut butter and jelly on whole grain bread.
- Send boiled, salted edamame instead of chips.
- Try toasted nori (seaweed) snacks instead of chips.

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- Perfect for fall: send soup in a thermal container.
- Send fruit as a naturally sweet snack.
- Pack hummus and carrots or snap peas.
- Hop on the [bento box](#) wagon. Not all recipes are unprocessed, but there are some creative options.
- Pack whole grain salads.
- Make chickpea salad sandwiches instead of using deli meat.

UNPROCESSED SNACKS

We tend to think of snack foods as things that come in snack-size packages: cookies, crackers, candy, etc. Switching to unprocessed snacks is cheaper and healthier (and arguably more delicious). Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Fresh fruit is sweet and all natural! Add some cheese or nut butter to make it more filling.
- Fresh veggies: branch out from baby carrots and try jicama sticks or snap peas. Dip in hummus for protein (and garlic).
- Hummus and veggies or whole wheat pita bread (homemade or read the label).
- Nuts, especially almonds and walnuts –or make your own trail mix with dried fruit and nuts.
- Popcorn –skip the microwave packages and DIY! Scoop ½ cup of popcorn kernels into a brown paper lunch bag, fold over the top to prevent escapees, and microwave for about 90 seconds (your microwave time may vary). Add seasonings, skip the creepy chemicals!
- Crackers: look for 100% whole grain (read your labels), or make some at home! Top with cheese, veggies, fruit, nut butter, etc.
- Yogurt parfaits –plain yogurt with fruit and/ or granola.
- Homemade potato chips –[in the microwave](#). Or [apple chips](#). Or [kale chips](#)!
- Hard-boiled eggs with a little salt and pepper.
- Instead of HFCS-based fruit snacks, make fruit leather at home. Or just send fruit.
- Applesauce with cinnamon is great for fall, but read labels or try making your own in about 20 minutes.

UNPROCESSED ON A BUDGET

The most common complaint going in to the challenge other than “I don’t have enough time” is “unprocessed food costs more.” While in some cases that could be true (large companies buy in bulk and use less-expensive ingredients on purpose –we won’t even get started talking about government subsidies), there are definite ways to stretch your unprocessed dollars.

Meal planning. There is more discussion under the Resources section, but planning ahead saves you time and money.

Make a list. Grocery shopping can get expensive if you don’t have a plan. You can buy too much that goes to waste, too little and need to make another trip or fall back on convenience food, or impulsively buy unneeded items.

Reduce your meat consumption. Meat is expensive. Taking part in Meatless Mondays or using meat as a condiment instead of the center of your plate can greatly reduce your grocery bill.

Beans. An amazing and inexpensive source of protein, fiber, and nutrients, beans are amazingly versatile. Use them as a main dish (black bean burgers or mujadarrah, anyone?), a side (baked beans or a cool bean salad), a soup base or addition, an enchilada or burrito filling –heck, you can even make black bean brownies.

Some great staples are chickpeas (garbanzo beans), black beans, pinto beans, cannellini beans, lentils, and split peas. Canned beans aren’t terribly expensive (check for preservatives), and dried beans are even cheaper. Most dried beans can be soaked overnight to reduce cooking times, or cooked in a slow cooker.

Buy in bulk. This could be through a co-op or Costco, or just in the bulk bins at the natural foods or grocery store. “Fancy” steel cut oatmeal can be \$7 per pound in the metal can, but is \$0.99/ pound for organic steel cut oats in the bulk bins (even at Whole Foods). Don’t have storage space? Try recruiting a friend to split that flat of canned tomatoes.

Buy seasonally and on sale. Coupon-clipping is less effective when you aren’t buying packaged items, but you’ll save a lot of money buying ingredients that are in season. There’s a reason we eat more pumpkin and sweet potatoes in the fall and watermelon in the summer. Embrace what’s fresh and ripe to save money.

Farmers markets. Sure, you can compare hot house tomatoes from the grocery store to organic heirlooms at the market and cry foul, but many items are actually less expensive at farmers markets. Try going at the end of the market when vendors are trying to sell off what’s left, ask about blemished produce (like “cosmetically challenged” avocados for half price), or buying a larger quantity (like 20 pounds of apples at once). Many farmers markets now accept and/ or double WIC/ SNAP/ Food Stamps, too!

Grow your own. A packet of seeds, a little dirt, and a recycled container can provide a lot more fresh herbs than the wilted \$3 bunch from the grocery store. All you need is a sunny windowsill, patio, fire escape, or small outdoor area. (Did you know that SNAP Benefits/ Food Stamps can be used to buy food-producing plants? Check out www.snapgardens.org!)

Preserve. Can, ferment, pickle, or freeze for later!

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Ethnic markets. Spices are often much cheaper at co-ops (you can often buy small amounts in bulk) or at ethnic markets. Ginger and garlic are often cheaper at Asian markets, and peppers and tortillas from the Mexican mercado can't be beat! Look for Middle Eastern shops to buy items like dates, olives, and orange blossom water. Sure, it can mean an extra stop at the store, but think of it as a field trip instead of an errand.

Frozen fruit and vegetables. Fresh is preferable, but buying frozen can be just as nutritious or possibly more so (most produce is now flash-frozen shortly after harvest) and extremely convenient. Frozen veggies can get tossed with pasta or pilafs, and frozen fruit makes great smoothies or desserts.

Make it at home instead of buying it. There are a lot of links in this guide so you can make common grocery purchases at home. Yes, it takes more time, but it can be a fun project (especially with kids) and often can be done in bulk.

You can also save a lot of money by eating at home instead of at restaurants. One trick is to look at restaurant menus for kitchen inspiration.

Some ideas to try making at home: [bread](#), [crackers](#), dehydrating fruit, meat substitutes ([tofu](#), tempeh, [seitan](#), veggie burgers), [charcuterie](#) or sausage, [cheese](#) or [yogurt](#), [pickles](#), [sauerkraut](#), applesauce, condiments (ketchup, mustard, or mayo), [granola](#), jam or jelly, [soy milk](#) or [almond milk](#), [nut butters](#).

UNPROCESSED TOOLS

FOOD JOURNAL

Whether you're planning on cutting out all processed foods or just want to focus on a few, it's hard to change what you eat if you don't know what that is. A helpful tool is a food journal.

This is not to judge what you eat, it is merely a record. Think of it like scientific research. You can use a smart phone app, track in your planner or a notebook, or download this handy form: <http://centerstagewellness.com/files/SASS/SASSFoodJournal.pdf>

Write down everything you eat. You don't have to track calories or fat grams, just write down "whole wheat toast with jam" or "six Oreos" or "large Caesar salad." Additional information to record: what time you ate, what you drank, how hungry you were, and how you felt emotionally.

Track this for up to a week. Note any patterns: do you eat more sugar when you're stressed? Do you drink more coffee in the morning or the afternoon? Do you snack in front of the TV before bed?

Which patterns would you most like to change? What factor do you think has the biggest impact on your eating habits? Which processed foods are showing up the most that you want to eliminate?

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MEAL PLANNING RESOURCES

There's no right or wrong way to meal plan, and your approach will be very different if you're an urban single versus a rural family. Be flexible. Don't plan a new-to-you recipe every night of the week or you may get overwhelmed. Try a few tips and decide what works for you!

Taking 30-60 minutes once a week can save you stress and hours in the kitchen or running to the store later in the week. And there's no shame in planning breakfast-for-dinner or every-man-for-themselves nights.

Use a meal planning service. We love friend-of-October-Unprocessed [The Fresh 20](#). These budget-friendly menu-planning lists give you 20 ingredients with recipes for 5 meals – no preservatives, no processed foods, nothing frozen. Plans are available in classic, vegetarian, and gluten-free.

Pick a general theme. For example: Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday, Soup and Salad Wednesday, Leftover Thursday, Pizza Friday. The actual meal depends on what's in season or on sale.

The middle ground. Chart out your recipes and leftovers for the week. Schedule in lunch meetings or dinners out.

Here is a handy form to use: <http://centerstagewellness.com/files/WeeklyMealPlanner.pdf>

DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS

TIPS FOR VEGANS AND VEGETARIANS

When people go meatless, it's common to rely on faux meat: Veggie burgers, "chik" nuggets, and the like. Those are great transition foods, but when the focus is on eating unprocessed, they can become problematic. It's also easy to be a "junk food vegan" or vegetarian – just because something doesn't contain animal products doesn't make it automatically healthy.

So kudos to you for taking the pledge! Here are some tips to help you.

Meat replacements: Many veggie burgers, veggie dogs, etc. are made with all sorts of preservatives and chemicals. The basics like tofu, tempeh, and seitan are usually fine (see above); it's the ones with "textured vegetable protein" to watch out for. Veggie burgers are the easiest to make at home – try lentil-walnut-quinoa, or [spicy jalapeno black bean](#) burgers.

Ethnic food: If you grew up eating a Standard American Diet (think meat-and-potatoes), it can be harder to get past the idea of, well, meat and potatoes. Focus on dishes like curries, stir-fries, soups, and hearty salads. There's nothing wrong with eating a giant bowl of roasted veggies as a meal.

Non-dairy milk: Many non-dairy milk brands add thickeners and/or sugar, so read the labels or try making your own – all you need is a blender.

Non-dairy yogurt: Most that we found have lots of thickeners and sugar added. Decide where you draw the line, or [try making your own at home](#).

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Non-dairy cheese: You may want to give up your “mozzarella shreds” for the month, but you can go to town with [nut-based spreads](#) or test out [these recipes from Vegetarian Times](#).

TIPS FOR THE GLUTEN-FREE

Luckily, there is a lot of food that is naturally gluten-free! The trick comes in when talking about gluten-free food products that normally contain gluten.

In 2010 we learned about [gluten-free flours](#), and in 2011 we learned [all about gums](#).

Jenn over at Jenn Cuisine cooks for her gluten-free husband and has a great resource post about [dishes that are naturally gluten-free](#) and organizes [monthly link roundups of dishes from around the blogosphere](#) that are gluten-free, even if the blogger doesn't focus on that.

Instead of focusing on the gluten-free replacements that may not be unprocessed, think about all the foods you CAN eat:

- Meat, eggs, and unprocessed dairy
- Tofu and some tempeh (not all is gluten-free)
- Rice, corn, millet, buckwheat, potatoes, oats, and other gluten-free starches
- Nuts, seeds, beans, legumes
- Fruits and vegetables

If you just can't wrap your head around cutting out xanthan gum, maybe that could be a deliberate exception. Decide if that's right for you, or if this month is when you'll focus on alternatives instead of substitutes.

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APPENDIX A - PREVIOUS POSTS

In an effort to offer up fresh (no pun intended) content each year of the challenge, we try not to repeat topics too much. That said, there is a trove of valuable information from the past three years, presented here for your convenience in chronological order.

Post	Author's blog
2010 Posts	
Also available here: http://www.eatingrules.com/2010/09/october-unprocessed/	
What Do You Want?	Eating Rules
Eat More Whole Grains	Eating Rules
Keeping It Easy	Bring to Boil
Expanding Choice: Get Out of a Food Rut	Lisa Lucas Talbot
Eat More Whole Grains	Bob's Red Mill
Risotto with Butternut Squash and Sage	Jackie Writes
Preparing Dried Chickpeas	California Greek Girl
Homemade Granola	Gastronicity
When Processed Is Not an Option	Adventures of a Gluten-Free Mom
Grown-up Vegetable Soup	Banamak.org
In Praise of Traditional Food Processing	Oldways
Growing Your Own	Gardenatrix
Five Ways to Make Unprocessed Eating Easier than Ever	Allison Jones
Everyday 100%Whole Wheat Bread	Deliciously Organic
Traveling Unprocessed	Uncovering Food
Vegan Shepherd's Pie	What Would Cathy Eat
How to Make Butter	Piccante Dolce
Real Food for Your Family	Savor the Thyme
Gluten-Free Flours	Gluten-Free Doctor Recipes
Being Poor Doesn't Have to Mean Eating Poorly	Dianasaur Dishes
Whole Grain Oatmeal Maple Spice Cookies	SweetChip
The 80/20 Rule	Casual Kitchen
Baked Apples	Lillian's Test Kitchen
Cooking in a Small Kitchen	Small Boston Kitchen
Real Food from Real People	The Scrumptious Pantry
Backyard Chickens Have the Good Life	What's Cooking

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[Connecting Farmers, Cook, and Eaters](#)

[Is It More Expensive to Eat Local and Organic?](#)

[Sustainability](#)

[Heirloom Seeds](#)

[Unprocessed Foods and Athletic Performance](#)

[Ten Snacking Tips for the Busy Parent](#)

[School Lunch Reform](#)

[Get Creative](#)

[Maple Spiced Pumpkin Pie](#)

[Natural and Artificial Flavors](#)

[Food with Integrity](#)

[Three Healthy Desserts](#)

[Halloween Unprocessed, Part 1: Date Cocoa-Nut Candy](#)

[Halloween Unprocessed, Part 2: Honey Nut Amaranth Alegrias](#)

[\(Un\)Processing it All](#)

[Farmers, Cooks, Eaters](#)

[The Leftover Queen](#)

[Green Cross](#)

[Seasonally Seattle](#)

[Gluten-Free Triathlete](#)

[OMG! Yummy](#)

[Fed Up With Lunch](#)

[The WHOLE Gang](#)

[Eat the Love](#)

[The Healthy Apron](#)

[Munchie Musings](#)

[Alexandra Jamieson](#)

[Awake At The Whisk](#)

[Poor Girl Eats Well](#)

[Eating Rules](#)

2011 posts

Also available here: <http://www.eatingrules.com/2011/11/we-made-it/>

[Overcoming the Time Hurdle \(Roasted Tomato Salsa\)](#)

[Three Tips to Make Sure Unprocessed Makes Cents \(Tomato-Topped Sole\)](#)

[Unprocessed –and Organic –on a Budget \(Fusilli with Chard & Bacon\)](#)

[For the Love of Beans](#)

[An interview with Slow Food USA President Josh Viertel](#)

[Kale Pesto](#)

[Baked Apple Oatmeal](#)

[How to Make Fluffy Quinoa \(And Quinoa Tabbouleh\)](#)

[The Salad Dressing Formula](#)

[Seven Ways to Survive October Unprocessed with Kids \(Maple Apple Chips\)](#)

[Plan for Success \(Heartwarming crust less pie\)](#)

[The Tomato Tart](#)

[Food On The Table](#)

[Deliciously Organic](#)

[What Would Cathy Eat](#)

[Eating Rules](#)

[Cooking on the Weekends](#)

[The Gracious Pantry](#)

[Domestic Fits](#)

[Eat Naked](#)

[Simple Bites](#)

[The Fresh 20](#)

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[Zombies, Processed Foods, and the Advertising-Consumption Cycle](#)

[Convincing your family and friends \(Slow Cooker Refried Beans\)](#)

[Ten Unprocessed School Lunch Ideas](#)

[Baked Chicken Nuggets](#)

[The Scoop on White Flour \(100%Whole Wheat Bread\)](#)

[Chickpea, Pumpkin Seed & Feta Salad](#)

[All About Gums \(Gluten-Free Pumpkin Pecan Muffins\)](#)

[Gluten-Free, Dairy-Free Irish Soda Bread](#)

[Let them eat cake! \(Blood Orange and Almond Upside-down Cake\)](#)

[A Few Important Basics \(Kale-Spinach Paneer\)](#)

[Homemade Fritos](#)

[The Inconvenient Vegan \(Quinoa with Tomatoes and Basil\)](#)

[The Real Secret to Ditching Industrialized Food – Forever \(Power Pancakes\)](#)

[What About Rabbit Meat?](#)

[Bulk is Beautiful \(How To Make Polenta\)](#)

[Unprocessed, But Not By Choice \(Gluten-Free Pumpkin Applesauce Bundt Cake\)](#)

[Stevia, Truvia, and PureVia](#)

[Five Tips for Low Sodium Living \(Turkey Meatloaf\)](#)

[Sukkot Unprocessed \(Roasted Root Vegetables\)](#)

[Build Your Children out of Stupid-Easy Homemade Fajitas](#)

[Bee Safe! A Tale of Tainted Honey & How to Avoid It](#)

[Honey Bee Healthy](#)

[Judaism, Raw and Unprocessed \(Whole Grain Challah\)](#)

[Grind Your Own Grains \(Butternut Squash Pizza\)](#)

[How To Make Sea Salt](#)

[Rescuing Rambo](#)

[Poor Girl Eats Unprocessed \(Sweet Potato, Mango, and Edamame Salad\)](#)

[Casual Kitchen](#)

[100 Days of Real Food](#)

[Food For My Family](#)

[Kathleen Flinn](#)

[Bob's Red Mill](#)

[Savoring the Thyme](#)

[Gluten-Free Doctor Recipes](#)

[Lillian's Test Kitchen](#)

[84th and 3rd](#)

[Yumkid](#)

[Good. Food. Stories.](#)

[Meghan the Veghan](#)

[Sustainable Eats](#)

[Slow Money Farm](#)

[Talk of Tomatoes](#)

[You Can't Eat What?](#)

[Andy Bellatti, MS, RD](#)

[Low Sodium Blog](#)

[The Shiksa in the Kitchen](#)

[Weighty Matters](#)

[Awake At The Whisk](#)

[Georgia Pellegrini](#)

[Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann](#)

[MOMables](#)

[Salty Seattle](#)

[I Love Leftovers](#)

[Poor Girl Eats Well](#)

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[Limitations Can Be Liberating \(Beet Chips\)](#)

[From Processed to Unprocessed \(Sausage and Pepper Hash\)](#)

[Food for Healing & Five Ingredients to Avoid](#)

[How To Make Soy Milk](#)

[Time for an Oil Change... In Your Kitchen! \(Greek Lemon Marinade\)](#)

[How to Make Yogurt](#)

[How to Make a Simple Little Cheese](#)

[Can Your Own Tomatoes](#)

[Unprocessed Entertaining \(Apple Spice Cake with Greek Yogurt Icing\)](#)

[Kimchi doesn't have to be buried in your backyard to be delicious](#)

[Fasting and Feasting – A Christian Ethic for Eating \(Corn & Black Bean Chowder\)](#)

[Homemade Vanilla Extract](#)

[Maple Butternut Pudding](#)

[Building Relationships... with Pumpkin Fondue](#)

[Roll Your Own Cereal](#)

[How To Make Seitan](#)

[Maple Popcorn Balls](#)

[Fix Me A Snack](#)

[Fed Up With Lunch](#)

[OMG! Yummy](#)

[La Fuji Mama](#)

[California Greek Girl](#)

[Kitchen Stewardship](#)

[New England Cheesemaking Supply](#)

[Hedonia](#)

[La Casa De Sweets](#)

[I Make Pickles](#)

[The Whispered Life](#)

[Savour Fare](#)

[Pinch My Salt](#)

[Evil Shenanigans](#)

[Attune Foods](#)

[Little Blue Hen](#)

[Eat The Love](#)

2012 posts

Also available here: <http://www.eatingrules.com/2012/11/october-unprocessed-2012-posts/>

[A Simple lesson in Soup...with Carrot and Rosemary Soup](#)

[Homegrown Vegetarian Chili](#)

[Baked Sweet Potato Chips](#)

[Change Your Diet...with Muesli Recipe](#)

[Curried Vegetarian Comfort Stew](#)

[Casamiento Wraps](#)

[Kabocha Squash](#)

[Kathleen Flinn](#)

[What Would Cathy Eat](#)

[Family Spice](#)

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[Cooking On The Weekends](#)

[Foodie Goes Healthy](#)

[Go Dairy Free](#)

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[Unprocessed Fast Food](#)

[Pumpkin Maple Nut Bread Pudding](#)

[Raw Kale and Garbanzo Salad](#)

[Buckwheat and Hemp Fish Sticks](#)

[Beef Jerky](#)

[Weight Loss](#)

[Black Bean Quinoa Avocado Salad](#)

[Roasted Beet and Sweet Potato Hash](#)

[Vital Wheat Gluten](#)

[Kids in the Kitchen...Tomato Soup](#)

[Tomatillo Avocado Dressing](#)

[Veggie Puff Pastry](#)

[Eating Clean...Grape and Chive Pasta Salad](#)

[Blackberry Barley Breakfast Bake](#)

[Garnet Yam and Bacon Frittata](#)

[Defining Kosher...Roast Turkey and Juniper Gravy](#)

[Whole Grain Cheez-its](#)

[Ancient Grains..Mussels with Farro](#)

[Green Supreme Pasta](#)

[Farro Salad with Fava Beans](#)

[Butternut Squash and Chickpea Soup](#)

[Making Finnish Cheese](#)

[White Chocolate Pumpkin Dip](#)

[Apple Pecan "Mummy" Dumplings](#)

[How to Make Almond Milk](#)

[How to Make Corn Tortillas](#)

[How to Make Peanut Butter](#)

[How \(not\) to Make Butter](#)

[How to Make Vegan Mayonnaise](#)

[OMG! Yummy](#)

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[Poor Girl Eats Well](#)

[The Food Poet](#)

[Blue Kale Road](#)

[Mesa de Vida](#)

[Mimi Avocado](#)

[Jeanette's Healthy Living](#)

[Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods](#)

[Don't Panic Mom!](#)

[What's Gaby Cooking](#)

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[Levana Cooks](#)

[Good.Food.Stories](#)

[Maria Speck](#)

[Adventures with Nancy Rose](#)

[Fresh Food in a Flash](#)

[Shiksa in the Kitchen](#)

[Cooking Contest Central](#)

[Texanerin Baking](#)

[Evil Shenanigans](#)

[Seattle Seedling](#)

[Domestic Fits](#)

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[Stay at Home Foodie](#)

[Recipe Renovator](#)

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[Slow-Cooker Cran-Apple Butter](#)

[Fifteen Uses for Glass Jars](#)

[Front Yard Farming](#)

[Mysteries of Vanilla Extract](#)

[Vegan Cashew Cream Cheese](#)

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[Make Your Own Lara Bars](#)

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[Pickled Peppers](#)

[Nine Canning Tips](#)

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[How to Make Pancetta](#)

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[Homemade Honeycomb Gum](#)

[Maple Peanut Nougat Chocolate Clusters](#)

[Ten Steps to an Unprocessed Party](#)

[Absolute Worst Regular Meal](#)

[Ten Ways to Save \\$ on Unprocessed Food](#)

[The Power of One Small Change](#)

[Kitchen Stewardship](#)

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[Lillian's Test Kitchen](#)

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[The Wind Attack](#)

[Liz the Chef](#)

[Eat Naked](#)

[Gastronicity](#)

[Awesome Food](#)

[La Fuji Mama](#)

[Low Sodium Blog](#)

[Punk Domestics](#)

[She's Cookin](#)

[Salty Seattle](#)

[Eat the Love](#)

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[Weighty Matters](#)

[Healthy Green Kitchen](#)

[Shannon Wagner](#)

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[Oats: A Case Study](#)

[Five Rules for Unprocessed Eating](#)

[Ten Tips for Farmers Market Shopping](#)

[It All Begins with Planning](#)

[Raising Kids to Appreciate Unprocessed](#)

[Kale: Your Friend with Benefits](#)

[How I Quit Caffeine and Did Not Die](#)

[Is Your Unprocessed Food Ethical?](#)

[Eat Must Haves for Unprocessed Travel](#)

[Five Reasons for Increase in Gluten Reactions](#)

[Kicking the “Healthy” Junk Food Habit](#)

[Ten Reasons to Keep Backyard Chickens](#)

[Three Ways to Overcome Mental Hurdles](#)

[Where Sugar Hides](#)

[I Am an Orthorexic](#)

[Becoming a Not-So-Mad Scientist...Carnitas Style Tacos](#)

[Discovering the Greek Diet](#)

[Making Unprocessed Accessible and Locally Grown](#)

[So You Want To Be an Urban Farmer?](#)

[OMG...GMO! TMI! WTF!](#)

[Choosing Sustainable Seafood](#)

[Schools Selling Out: Free Gatorade](#)

[Lindner Bison's 15%Steak Rule](#)

[It's Okay. Limiting Candy won't Ruin Childhood](#)

[FoodCorps Helps Kids turn “Ick” into “Yum!”](#)

[Responsible Farming is Sustainable](#)

[How to Make a Meal Plan](#)

[“Failing” at #Unprocessed](#)

[Veg Girl RD](#)

[Jorj Morgan](#)

[Awake at the Whisk](#)

[Fit to the Finish](#)

[Food for My Family](#)

[Lexi Yoga](#)

[Lindsay Jones](#)

[Small Bites](#)

[The Healthy Voyager](#)

[The Gluten-Free Doctor](#)

[The Lunch Tray](#)

[Rustic Garden Bistro](#)

[Center Stage Wellness](#)

[A Food Centric Life](#)

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[Paleo Savvy](#)

[California Greek Girl](#)

[A Green City Girl](#)

[The New Market Gardener](#)

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[FoodCorps](#)

[Pete & Gerry's](#)

[The Fresh 20](#)

[Fed Up with Lunch](#)

APPENDIX B - AN UNPROCESSED PANTRY

GRAINS, FLOUR, CEREAL, BREAD, AND PASTA

Read more about [flours and grains in the FAQ post](#).

GRAINS: This category usually refers to [cereal grains](#). Another term used for unprocessed here is “whole grains,” meaning cereal grains that contain the germ, endosperm, and bran. Grains can be minimally processed in a way that retains all three parts (see FLOURS), but once the germ and bran are removed (think white rice), it’s considered *refined* instead of *whole*.

Whole grains you may know or want to try: wheat berries, oats (steel cut or rolled), barley (not pearl), brown rice, farro, spelt, kamut, rye, millet, quinoa, amaranth, triticale, teff, and buckwheat. One great place to look for new grains is in the bulk bins of your local grocery or natural foods store or co-op; just buy a cup and try it out.

If you’re not going to use your whole grains quickly, store them in the fridge or freezer as the nutritious elements of the grains can go rancid.

FLOUR: Flour has been around since 6000 B.C. and is made by milling grains into a powder. Refined flour became common during the industrial revolution when longer transportation distances made shelf life an issue, then processors started fortifying flour with some of the nutrients that were lost in the refining process.

Most flour is made from wheat, but can also be made of beans and legumes, rice, nuts and seeds, roots like tapioca and potatoes, and corn.

Refined flours not only remove the bran and germ, but are often bleached or “matured” with other chemicals, most commonly potassium bromide, benzoyl peroxide, ascorbic acid, or chlorine gas. Yep. Avoid flours during the challenge if possible, especially bleached flour.

Just like whole grains, the bulk bins are a great place to research new flours. A good summary for the challenge can be found here: <http://www.eatingrules.com/2013/09/unprocessed-faq-flour-grains/>

CEREAL: Breakfast cereal is made from grain or flour. This can range from oatmeal (unprocessed if made from rolled or cut oats, processed if found in a packet full of chemicals) to the ubiquitous box that’s “part of a healthy breakfast.” Read your labels and identify the flour used first. Hint: if the cereal is rainbow-hued, it’s probably processed.

In 2011, we learned [how to roll our own cereal](#), and in 2010, we got tips on [homemade granola](#). Oatmeal isn’t the only hot porridge option –try quinoa or millet in the morning.

BREAD: Only four ingredients are needed: flour, water, salt, and yeast. Make sure the flour is actually whole grain (see FLOUR, above). Tricky labeling: “wheat flour” is refined, “whole wheat flour” is whole grain.

Vital wheat gluten is often added to whole grain breads which, while a naturally-occurring part of wheat, is extracted through an industrial practice. Check your labels and/or decide if vital wheat gluten is vital (sorry, couldn’t resist) to your bread purchases.

PASTA: Noodles are made from flour-based dough –and are fun, if a bit time-consuming, to make at home. So long as the pasta is made from whole grain flour and doesn't contain weird additives, it's good to go. A sneaky one is couscous –often misidentified as a grain, couscous is actually made from semolina, just like Italian pasta.

SUGAR

This is probably one of the most common questions during the challenge, and it can be a little complicated. Decide what's right for you. [CLICK HERE for the sugar FAQ post](#), or read below for a brief summary.

SUGAR. The terms “sugar,” “granulated sugar,” “cane sugar,” “pure cane sugar,” “beet sugar,” and “table sugar” all refer to the bleached stuff: fine-white granulated crystals that come from [sugar cane](#) or [sugar beets](#). The bleaching is done with sulfur dioxide, an ingredient that hopefully isn't in your pantry. Next!

BROWN SUGAR. Regular “Brown Sugar” (the kind you get in the box at the grocery store) is usually just refined, bleached table sugar with a small amount (3.5% to 6.5%) of added molasses.

RAW” SUGAR (TURBINADO, MUSCOVADO, DEMERARA) starts with sugar cane, extract the juice, then heat it to evaporate the water. Once the sugar crystallizes, it is often spun in a centrifuge (hence the name turbinado) to further dry the sugar and remove some impurities. Shoot for Muscovado if you can find it. Beyond that, you'll need to decide what's right for you.

HONEY. Good to go; in fact, this is probably the most “unprocessed” sweetener available –supposedly. Most grocery store honey has actually been filtered and processed. Look for raw honey (the farmers market is a great place for this).

MAPLE SYRUP. We're not talking Log Cabin here, but real maple syrup made from the sap of maple trees. Make sure it's 100% maple syrup and enjoy!

STEVIA. Real, honest-to-goodness stevia is just the leaf of the stevia plant. If you can find that (or grow your own), or can find a powder that's truly just the ground-up leaves, it'll pass the test.

But the name-brand white powders? You couldn't make those at home. Here's a great post from a previous challenge about [Stevia, Purevia, and Truvia](#).

COCONUT SUGAR. Coconut sugar comes from the sap of the cut flower buds of the coconut palm. The sap is boiled down to a syrup, then evaporated to form crystals. Seems ok.

BROWN RICE SYRUP. Brown Rice Syrup is created by soaking/ cooking brown rice with enzymes. The liquid is then strained off and reduced to a syrup. It may also be produced by cooking brown rice flour (or brown rice starch) with enzymes —so your mental picture of simply boiling a pot of brown rice isn't necessarily accurate.

MOLASSES. Unsulphured molasses should be fine –molasses is made by mashing and boiling sugar cane.

AGAVE NECTAR. This comes from various types of agave plants, and while it may be less-processed than table sugar, it's more processed than other options like honey.

CORN SYRUP AND HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP. Both of these are too complicated to make at home. Off the list.

COMMON BAKING INGREDIENTS AND ADDITIVES

These ingredients are usually used in small quantities, but they're found in many of the foods most people eat. Most of these don't pass the kitchen test—but realistically, they're also fairly trivial ingredients. The "Deliberate Exception Clause" may come into play here.

Highlights are below, more details can be found in [the FAQ post](#).

XANTHAN GUM & GUAR GUM. Xanthan Gum comes from a bacteria fermented on corn syrup and then extracted. It's often added as an emulsifier, but it also "relaxes" when it's under sheer force. That's why you'll find it in salad dressings and sauces—it helps keep the dressing mixed together, but when you squeeze the bottle, it relaxes to let you drizzle the dressing on top.

To be fair, Xanthan Gum is not necessarily harmful (though it often gives people gas), and if you're gluten-free it can be an incredibly helpful ingredient in your baked goods.

Guar Gum, on the other hand, is made from guar beans that are dried, hulled, and ground to a fine powder. I'm pretty sure that could be done in a home kitchen. Although it too may give you gas too, strictly speaking we think it passes the kitchen test.

For more on gums, check out Dr. Jean Layton's post from a previous challenge on [Xanthan Gum, Guar Gum, and Methyl Cellulose](#).

NATURAL & ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS. "Artificial Flavors" obviously don't pass the kitchen test. But "Natural Flavors" don't, either! That's because "Natural Flavors" are likely made with a variety of chemical processes, too. All that's required for the "natural" label is that the initial product they start with has to be edible.

For more on this, check out Erin Coates, RD, LD's guest post on [Natural & Artificial Flavors](#).

SOY LECITHIN. Also incredibly common in processed foods these days, soy lecithin is something you couldn't make at home. It's commonly used as an emulsifier in foods to keep things in suspension. You'll see it in most commercial chocolate bars, too, since it helps keep the cocoa butter from separating from the cocoa.

CARAGEENAN. Carageenan is a "linear sulfated polysaccharide" that is extracted from seaweed. It's used in foods as a gelling or thickening agent. You'll find it in most store-bought soy milks and nut milks. Although it's been used since about 600 BC in China, modern carageenan is usually produced in a way that wouldn't pass the kitchen test.

CORN STARCH. You probably couldn't make this at home. Also, most corn starch used in food manufacturing is modified "by physically, enzymatically, or chemically treating the native starch." So it sure seems like corn starch doesn't really pass the kitchen test, either.

BAKING SODA & BAKING POWDER. People have been using baking soda for hundred(s) of years, and although [you might need to be a chemist to create it](#), it is such a basic ingredient—that doesn't seem to have a downside—that it seems counter-productive to exclude it. Similarly, baking powder is simply [baking soda with an added acid](#).

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The pitfall, however, is that many of these add cornstarch (usually just to keep it “powdery”). You may want to check out [this discussion with Tracy, Kirsten, and Xan](#) (in the comments section) before making your decision on whether or not to allow these in your diet for October.

YEAST. We’ve been using yeast for thousands of years, and we’re convinced we could [cultivate our own yeast at home](#), so that answers that. Up for a project? Harvest your own local yeast and [make a sourdough starter](#).

FOOD DYES/COLORS. If it’s got an official number, it’s obviously not going to pass the test. There are however, many natural dyes that **CAN** be used, such as beet juice, so those would be okay.

PRESERVATIVES. Most preservatives aren’t going to pass the test, of course. Sadly, almost every packaged food these days will include preservatives. Even hot sauces like Sriracha—which are highly acidic so probably don’t really need them—are using them because it extends shelf life just a little bit more.

CHOCOLATE

Another of the most commonly asked questions is, of course, about chocolate. With all the types of chocolate available, it can be tough (or at least tedious) to figure out which store-bought versions actually pass the kitchen test.

*In theory, chocolate passes the test. You could grow cacao, harvest and ferment the beans, dry them, roast them, crack them into **NIBS**, grind them into **LIQUOR**, conch the liquor, temper it, and then add some sugar and form it into a fabulous home-made chocolate bar.*

For more info, check out the [chocolate FAQ post](#), or read the highlight below.

COCOA POWDER. Sometimes listed as **COCOA SOLIDS**, it may also be called **CACAO** or just **COCOA**, and it passes the kitchen test easily.

However, “Cocoa processed with Alkali” or “Dutch-Processed Cocoa” (same thing), has an added alkali (a base) to the chocolate to counteract some of the acidity. It’s tricky to actually find exactly which alkali has been used to process the cocoa, since it’s not usually listed in the ingredients. Potassium bicarbonate seems to be the most common. Personally, we’re going to avoid any cocoa powder that has been alkalinized.

CHOCOLATE BARS. Most store-bought chocolate contains emulsifiers, flavorings, or other additives that you wouldn’t or couldn’t use if you were to make it at home. Lecithin (usually soy lecithin) is an emulsifier that keeps the cocoa and the cocoa butter from separating. Soy lecithin is [extracted from soybeans using hexane](#) –not really a home kitchen project.

Almost all chocolate bars contain sugar in some form or another, so apply the kitchen test to the specific type of sugar they use (some just list “sugar,” others will be more specific). These are listed above.

Other chocolate candies may add flavorings or other things that probably don’t pass the kitchen test. Read the ingredients list and apply the test to each one.

There **ARE** some commercially available chocolate bars that pass the test, and in our experience, the darker the bar (82% or 85%), the more likely it is to pass.

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WHITE CHOCOLATE. White chocolate is a candy that's made with sugar, milk, and cocoa butter. There are no cocoa solids (cocoa powder) at all. This may pass the kitchen test, depending on the specific ingredients and where you draw the line for yourself. But just remember that the beneficial parts of chocolate are found in the cocoa solids, so don't think that you're getting any health benefit from white chocolate.

MILK CHOCOLATE. Milk Chocolate is a solid chocolate that's been made with "milk." We put that in quotes, because it may be milk powder, liquid milk, or condensed milk. These types of chocolates usually have a lot of sugar—in the United States, they're only required to have a minimum of 10% of chocolate liquor (European states are a bit higher, in the 20-25% range). Most store-bought milk chocolate is probably not going to pass the kitchen test.

RAW CHOCOLATE & CACAO NIBS. "Raw" Chocolate is one that hasn't been processed or heated to the same degree (details on "raw" tend to be a bit sketchy, and vary with each company). Cacao Nibs (Cocoa Nibs) are the dried beans, usually broken into little pieces, and are sold either before or after roasting (much like any other seed or nut).

Both of these are probably your best bet for October. We love cacao nibs sprinkled on top of oatmeal—they give a nice crunch, and have a mild chocolate flavor. They're chocolate chips in the truest sense! For raw nibs, you can get brands like [Navitas Naturals](#) on Amazon. For roasted, we're partial to [Theo Chocolate's](#).

CONDIMENTS AND SEASONINGS

OILS: How about [a convenient chart comparing various cooking oils](#) and their health benefits?

Oils have been used for thousands of years, so while you could press your own olive or almond oil, you don't need to. That said, modern methods of oil extraction don't all pass the kitchen test.

Our favorite challenge-friendly fats: extra virgin olive oil; organic, virgin, unrefined coconut oil; butter from grass-fed cows; peanut oil for high heat stuff.

SALT: Yet another ingredient you can [make yourself](#) (but probably won't). Regular table salt contains anti-caking agents such as sodium aluminosilicate or magnesium carbonate, plus iodine to combat thyroid problems caused by iodine deficiency. Worried about goiter? Add more seaweed to your diet; it's a great natural source of iodine and other minerals.

KETCHUP: Many popular brands contain high fructose corn syrup, though some have come out with a HFCS-free version. It still contains some type of sugar, so decide where you stand on that and "natural flavors." Want to [make ketchup at home](#)? It looks easy!

MUSTARD: Mustard has fewer ingredients than ketchup, but "natural flavors" come up again. Read your labels, or take the opportunity to experiment with some [fancy homemade mustard](#).

MAYONNAISE: This emulsion should contain only egg yolk, lemon juice or vinegar, and oil. Salt optional. You can make fancy aiolis with garlic and mustard and herbs, or not. Check your labels or [take 5 minutes and make some at home](#).

SOY SAUCE: Soy sauce is made from water, wheat, soybeans, and salt, but often has added preservatives. Ironically, research found that Kikkoman (widely available) gluten-free soy sauce only

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contains water, soybeans, rice, and salt –no preservatives. Eden Organic brand sauces had no preservatives and are made with non-GMO soybeans, too.

NUT BUTTERS: Just nuts and salt? Enjoy! Most of the shelf-stable stuff has preservatives and added oils. It's also easy to make your own with a food processor or high-speed blender. Some nicer grocery and natural food stores also have “grind-your-own” stations, often near the bulk bins.

FRIDGE AND FROZEN

FRESH FRUIT: Not all of it should be stored in the fridge, but one of the best unprocessed items to stock is fresh fruit. A banana for breakfast, an apple with nut butter for a snack, or orange slices with orange blossom water for dessert are all unprocessed –and healthy. The natural sugars in fruit help reduce sugar cravings, and the brighter-colored the fruit, the more antioxidants it contains. Win-win!

FRESH VEGETABLES: Like fruit, fresh veggies are always a win. Salads, stir-fries, soups, pasta toppings, dips and spreads, crudités...Not a huge fan of certain fall veggies? Try roasting them. Cut into fairly uniform pieces, toss with olive oil, and bake at 425, turning once, for 20-40 minutes (depending on the veggie). This work for almost anything: broccoli or Brussels sprouts, parsnips or squash.

FROZEN VEGETABLES: Frozen veggies are actually a great option. Nowadays most of them are flash frozen within hours of harvesting so they still taste “in season” when you eat them. Toss frozen peas or spinach into your pasta water or fried rice. Plain frozen veggies are probably safe, but “meal in a bag” items should have their label checked.

EGGS: Eggs, if you're not vegan, are great! They make a quick breakfast or dinner, can be hard-boiled and added to salads and sandwiches, or poached to top a burger, pizza, or salad.

If you ARE vegan and normally use a vegan egg replacer in baking, try 1 tablespoon flax meal or chia seeds mixed with water, per egg.

TOFU, TEMPEH, and SEITAN: All these meat substitutes can be made at home, so you should be good to go. That said, the packaged versions in the store can contain added preservatives and flavorings. Check your labels and decide where to draw the line.

[Making tofu at home](#) isn't that different from making cheese. *Nigari* is a natural salt coagulant made from sea water.

Tempeh is a fermented soybean product and [can also be made at home](#). With both tempeh and tofu, buy organic if you're concerned about GMO soybeans.

Seitan (mock duck) [can be made at home, too](#), with only 2 ingredients!

BUTTER/MARGARINE: You can easily [make butter at home](#), but of course you don't have to. Check your labels, however, as the only ingredients should be cream and salt. “Spreadable” butters, whether in sticks or tubs, can contain added oils. Some butter also contains mysterious “natural flavors,” which may or may not pass your kitchen test.

As for margarine, its ingredients range from dubious to terrifying.

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YOGURT: [Yogurt is also easy to make at home](#). All you need is milk and a starter culture. For store-bought yogurt (especially low-fat varieties), thickeners are often added such as gelatin. Also be on the watch for natural and artificial flavors, sugar, and high fructose corn syrup.

Find plain yogurt too tart? Add fresh fruit and a drizzle of honey, or some jam (check the ingredients) to flavor it yourself.

ICE CREAM: Ice cream and sorbet are also easily made at home, but many commercial brands add all sorts of thickeners and flavors, most notably high fructose corn syrup. Read your labels, or try making your own!

CHEESE: [Many cheeses can be made at home](#) with minimal ingredients and equipment. Watch out for processed cheeses and “cheese products,” however. Cheese should be made from milk, salt, and enzymes/rennet or some type of acid.

As a quick comparison, Kraft Singles (those plastic-wrapped slices of “pasteurized cheese product”) contain: Cheddar cheese, milk, whey, milkfat, milk protein concentrate, salt, calcium phosphate, sodium citrate, whey protein concentrate, sodium phosphate, sorbic acid as a preservative, apocarotenal (color), annatto (color), enzymes, vitamin D3, cheese culture, yellow dye.

Next are Organic Valley’s new American Singles: Organic pasteurized cultured milk, salt, organic annatto, microbial enzymes.

MEAT: Meat seems like a pretty solid choice: it’s made of meat. Right? Well..Let’s start with a regular old package of, say, steaks from the grocery store. The label reads, “Tenderized with papain, contains up to 22% of a solution of water, maltodextrin, sodium phosphate.” Papain is a powdered enzymatic meat tenderizer also used in topical drugs for humans which warranted a warning from the FDA.

Then there are processed and deli meats. Here’s the ingredient list from Hormel’s Natural Choice line Oven Roasted Carved Chicken Breast: *Chicken Breast Meat with Rib Meat, Water, Natural Chicken Flavor (Chicken Broth, Natural Flavor, Water, Salt), Turbinado Sugar, Salt, Rice Starch, Carrageenan (from seaweed), Natural Flavorings, Baking Soda.*

Some are better, some are worse. As always, do check the labels.

BEVERAGES

Worried about happy hour? Check the highlights below or get the low-down in the [beverages FAQ post](#).

COFFEE: Yes, you can have coffee! Although it would be difficult (and time-consuming) to grow, harvest, and roast/dry your own coffee, it’s certainly possible.

Just remember to keep an eye on what you’re putting INTO your coffee or tea! Powdered creamer and flavored creamers (which don’t have much, if any, cream in them) aren’t going to pass the test (seriously, [check out their ingredients](#)). It’s also easy to [make your own creamer at home](#).

TEA: Like coffee, you can grow your own tea leaves. Herbal teas (technically “tisanes”) are simply herbs or twigs steeped in hot water. Try brewing your own mint-tarragon tea, chamomile, or a simple mix of ginger and lemon (great if you have an early fall cold). Be sure to double-check the ingredients, as more and more teas are adding “natural flavors” and other additives.

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BEER: The ingredients in beer are grain, water, yeast, and hops. Some “specialty” beers may add herbs or spices, and some may add other flavorings (and of course they don’t put them on the label -- alcoholic beverages have exemptions, inexplicably), but at the core, it’s just those four ingredients — and it’s a surprisingly low-tech process to turn them into beer. So any “classic” beer should pass the test with ease.

Beer is also easy to make at home. This could be a great way to convince reluctant family or friends to participate and try some home brewing!

WINE: Traditionally, wine is made with just two ingredients: Grapes and yeast. You can also make wine at home!

There is the question of [sulfites](#), though. Sulfites are a naturally occurring part of the winemaking process, but most winemakers add additional sulfites to help prevent spoilage. Decide for yourself if you’ll seek out no-sulfites-added wine (some are available; they’ll say it on the label).

[Other ingredients and additives may also be used in winemaking](#)—and they’re NOT likely to be on the label —such as gelatin, isinglass, albumin (from egg whites), charcoal, acacia (gum arabic), and calcium alginate. These ingredients are not usually detectable in the final product.

Many of them might pass the kitchen test, but others might not. Also, [many are from animal sources](#) (the charcoal may come from animal bones, and isinglass comes from fish bladders—who knew?), so vegans may want to look for vegan-certified wines.

You decide if you want to seek out homemade wines, or if commercial wine passes your test. It could be an opportunity to seek out wines you haven’t tried before.

OTHER BOOZE: Although home distillery isn’t recommended (and it may be illegal in your area), it’s certainly possible. Just skip the gimmicky flavored liquors and spirits.

Also note, if it’s a jug of drink mix that contains alcohol, they’re not required to disclose the ingredients. Those are likely sweetened with high fructose corn syrup, and often contain artificial flavors and colors, but you have no way of knowing for sure.

Fun project idea: make your own liquors like limoncello or cranberry liqueur. It takes some time, but one batch makes for great homemade (and unprocessed) holiday gifts.

JUICE: When it comes to store-bought juice, I’m going to discount the obvious offenders (“Sunny D” [isn’t even close to juice](#)). But what about “100% Juice”?

Let’s take orange juice, as an example. Oranges aren’t a year-round crop, so in order to get “not from concentrate” O.J. anytime we want, the juice folks squeeze the oranges when they’re in season, and store the juice in large tanks. To keep it from spoiling, they remove all the oxygen.

Unfortunately, that also removes the flavor, so they have to add the flavor back in. Legally, in order to maintain the “100%” moniker, the flavors need to be derived from oranges themselves, but beyond that, details are sketchy. Each company has its own “flavor pack,” which ensures their own unique, consistent flavor profile. [Here’s more detail](#), if you want it.

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So does that pass the kitchen test? We'll leave that to you to decide. In the meantime, if you can get your hands on a few **ACTUAL** oranges, try a side-by-side comparison, and then let us know if you think the boxed "100%juice" really does taste the same as truly fresh-squeezed.

DAIRY MILK: Theoretically, milk should pass the kitchen test with flying colors, right? But this is actually one of those gray areas which we encourage you to consider ahead of time.

Most "whole milk" is not really whole anymore. It's been split apart, put back together, and heavily processed. Some of those processes you could do at home (pasteurization, for example, is just heating), but others, not so much.

Do your own research and thinking on this, try to find out as much as you can about the milk you and your family is drinking, and decide where you want to draw the line for yourself.

NON-DAIRY MILKS: You can actually make soymilk and nut milks at home fairly easily. Here's Rachael's post on [how to make soymilk](#) and Stacy Brewer's on [how to make almond milk](#).

Most commercially produced faux-milks contain other ingredients that you wouldn't use at home. [Carageenan](#), for example, is a thickening agent that's derived from seaweed. This varies widely per brand, so read labels.

West Soy's organic unsweetened soymilk contains only water and soybeans. Compare that to Silk brand which adds calcium carbonate, sea salt, natural flavors, carrageenan, vitamin A palmitate, vitamin D2, riboflavin, and vitamin B12.

SODA: Obviously most commercial sodas like Coca-Cola or Pepsi aren't going to pass the test. Besides the processed sugars, there are all sorts of other additives that wouldn't be considered whole foods.

But there are some fizzy waters that do pass muster. "Seltzer" —which is just carbonated water — should be okay and can even be made at home. The name "Club Soda" is often used interchangeably with seltzer, but it may have other salts or minerals added.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE PLEDGE!



Andrew Wilder has been a “foodie” for as long as he can remember, but it wasn’t until his “a-ha!” moment in 2009 when he decided to make healthful living and eating a primary focus in his life. He writes at *Eating Rules*, with the philosophy that *“Healthy eating doesn’t have to suck.”* He now makes his living mostly doing web design and internet consulting, and offers tech support & training for other bloggers. He’s also a co-founder of [Healthy Ads](#), an online advertising network connecting ethical companies with health bloggers and their audiences.

W: <http://www.eatingrules.com>

E: andrew@eatingrules.com

T: <http://twitter.com/eatingrules>

F: <http://facebook.com/eatingrules>



Stacy Spensley is a certified holistic health coach who supports overwhelmed men and women to integrate sustainable, step-by-step diet, mindset, and lifestyle changes so they can feel awesome and kick ass at life. She is professionally bossy and an ardent supporter of the Oxford comma. She’s also really good at Twitter.

W: <http://centerstagewellness.com>

E: stacy@centerstagewellness.com

T: <http://twitter.com/stacyspensley>

F: <http://facebook.com/CenterStageWellness>



Suzanne Elizondo, MS, RD is a high energy registered dietitian with a mandate to thrive! Suzanne specializes in nurturing mind/body connections. As a dynamic teacher and coach, Suzanne provides individual consultations, group programming and corporate workshops. Suzanne believes a healthy mind is the foundation for a healthy body, and she helps individuals regain a sense of balance and pleasure with nutrition and healthful lifestyles. She is certified by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in pediatric, teen and adult weight management.

E: elizondo.suzanne@gmail.com

F: <https://www.facebook.com/Suzelizondo>