

ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS (UPFs)

What are Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)?

Food processing has several benefits such as extending shelf life, saving time, reducing waste, and lowering prices. Nonetheless, excessive processing can diminish nutritional value and result in health concerns. The NOVA classification system classifies foods based on their degree of industrial processing rather than their nutrient composition

Examples include snacks, soda, candy bars, ready-made sauces, and vegan alternatives.

Group 1: Unprocessed or minimally processed foods

- Food consists of edible parts from various sources like plants, animals, fungi, algae, and water.
- Preservation methods include chilling, freezing, drying, or pasteurizing.
- Examples of food products are fresh/frozen fruits and vegetables, chilled meat and fish, flours, plain yogurt, eggs, and milk.



Group 2: Processed culinary ingredients

- Different processing methods are used like pressing, refining, grinding, and milling to create products for preparing, seasoning, and cooking Group 1 foods. These products include butter, soups, broths, breads, preserves, salads, and drinks.



Group 3: Processed foods

- Group 1 foods can be transformed into simple products with the addition of sugar, oil, salt, or other Group 2 ingredients, and basic processing to prolong shelf life or enhance sensory qualities.
- This can include preservation, cooking, and fermentation of bread or cheese.
- Examples are canned vegetables, fruits and legumes; salted or sugared nuts and seeds; salted, cured or smoked meats canned fish etc.



Group 4: Ultra-processed food and drink products

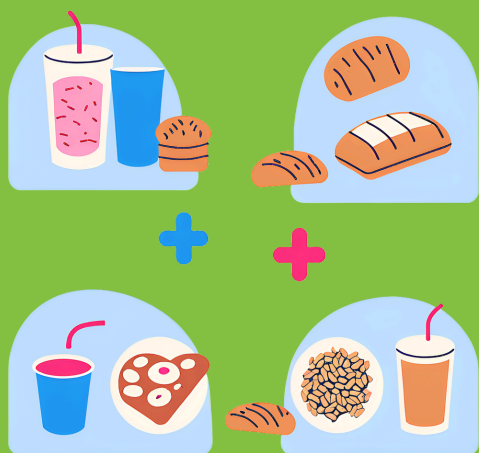
- Ultra-processed foods contain multiple ingredients, including those used in processed foods, and also additives that imitate the sensory qualities of Group 1 foods or disguise undesirable ones.
- Group 1 foods are either absent from or make up only a small proportion of ultra-processed foods.
- These products include carbonated drinks, cakes, biscuits, sweets, breakfast cereals, processed cheese etc.



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What are the reasons for the concerns surrounding UPFs?

- In Western countries, Ultra-Processed Foods (UPF) contribute significantly to daily calorie intake, with the UK showing high consumption rates.
- UPFs are associated with health risks including obesity, metabolic syndrome, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, as well as mental health issues like anxiety and depression.



What does the evidence suggest?

- Health issues linked to Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs) are not definitively attributed to their nutritional content or additives, lacking confirmed causation.
- Critics caution against dismissing all UPFs prematurely, highlighting the diverse range within this category.
- UPFs vary in nutritional value, including unhealthy options like sugary drinks and cakes, as well as nutritious choices like high-fibre cereals and wholemeal bread.
- Restricting UPFs without evidence may impact nutrient intake.

Are all Ultra Processed Foods bad for you?

- Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) have been associated with adverse health effects, yet some can still be part of a balanced diet.
- However, is a meal of baked beans on toast (using store-bought bread) equivalent to a pack of biscuits?
- The variety of foods classified as UPFs is extensive, and dismissing them entirely is not always essential or feasible for many people.



What about the nutritional value of Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs)?

- A loaf of multi-seed wholemeal and a white sliced loaf, both ultra-processed, vary in nutrition.
- Processing is necessary for food safety. Heat treatments can affect antioxidant properties and protein digestibility.
- Unhealthy foods are not solely defined by processing methods.

Should we stop eating processed food?

- Although processed foods are often necessary, not all are unhealthy.
- Canned beans, Greek yoghurt, canned fish, cheese, and fermented foods can provide good nutrition.
- Fermented vegetables, bread, and dairy products have been essential sources of nutrients for thousands of years, unlike ultra-processed foods like doughnuts and chicken nuggets.



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