

Ultra-processed foods are breaking your heart

March 22 2021



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Ultra-processed foods account for 58% of total energy in the average U.S. diet, but diet is a modifiable risk factor in the prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD). A study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that higher consumption of ultra-processed foods is associated with an increased risk of CVD incidence

and mortality, with each additional daily serving found to further increase risk.

"The consumption of ultra-processed foods makes up over half of the daily calories in the average American [diet](#) and are increasingly consumed worldwide. As [poor diet](#) is a major modifiable risk factor for heart disease, it represents a critical target in prevention efforts," said Filippa Juul, MS, Ph.D., a faculty fellow at the New York University School of Public Health and lead author of the study. "Our findings add to a growing body of evidence suggesting cardiovascular benefits of limiting ultra-processed foods. Ultra-processed foods are ubiquitous and include many foods that are marketed as healthy, such as protein bars, breakfast cereals and most industrially produced breads. Population-wide strategies such as taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages and other ultra-processed foods and recommendations regarding processing levels in national dietary guidelines are needed to reduce the intake of ultra-processed foods. Of course, we must also implement policies that increase the availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious, minimally processed foods, especially in disadvantaged populations. At the clinical level, there is a need for increased commitment to individualized nutrition counseling for adopting sustainable heart-healthy diets."

When foods are processed it may remove beneficial nutrients and other naturally occurring benefits, while adding non-beneficial nutrients and [food](#) additives. Processing also changes the physical structure of foods. The consumption of ultra-processed foods is linked with being overweight/obese, high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome and Type 2 diabetes.

Researchers used data from the Framingham Offspring Study to examine the role ultra-processed foods play in cardiovascular disease. After excluding participants with pre-existing CVD or [missing data](#), the

study included 3,003 middle-aged adults (on average 53.5 years). Over half of participants were female, 33.1% had undergone 16 years or more of education and two-thirds were either former or current smokers. Study participants were primarily Caucasian. Overall, 5.8% had diabetes and 19% had [high blood pressure](#); prevalence was higher among participants who were high consumers of ultra-processed foods compared to low consumers.

Diet was assessed by mail using a food questionnaire where participants reported the frequency of consumption of certain foods in the previous year, with options ranging from

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