

Is there a connection between ultraprocessed food and cancer?

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Enjoy fresh vegetables from your local farmers market. Credit: Mayo Clinic

There is a growing body of evidence that shows ultraprocessed foods are not only unhealthy but increase the risk of cancers. The term ultraprocessed food was created as a way to categorize food, known as

the NOVA classification. The system allows experts to better understand the health impact of different food categories.

Mayo Clinic's Dr. Dawn Mussallem talks more about the connection between ultraprocessed food and cancer.

"The average American in the United States consumes at least 63% ultraprocessed foods," says Dr. Mussallem.

She says [vegetables](#) only account for 12% of the average American diet—and half of those vegetables consumed are processed.

"We know that ultraprocessed foods are linked directly to premature mortality or deaths."

They also are linked to colorectal, ovarian and [breast cancer](#).

"Studies are showing us is that not only do the ultraprocessed foods increase the risk of cancer, but that after a [cancer diagnosis](#) such foods increase the risk of dying," Dr. Mussallem says.

What qualifies as ultraprocessed food?

"Ultraprocessed foods would be things in a package—things like crackers, and pastries and cupcakes and muffins, processed meat," she says.

They include ingredients you can't bring into your own kitchen.

"With those ultraprocessed foods, you're getting chemicals and additives that likely are very risky for cancer survivors," says Dr. Mussallem.

Add plenty of fruits and vegetables to your diet. Eat [whole grains](#),

legumes, nuts and seeds for optimal health benefits.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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