

# Study finds ice cream, potato chips may be as addictive as drugs

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There might be some truth to the potato chip ad that boasts, "You can't

eat just one."

A study from the University of Michigan found people can show signs of addiction to ultra-processed foods, which include [ice cream](#), [potato chips](#), and other products high in sugar and carbohydrates.

The researchers analyzed 281 studies from 36 countries and discovered 14% of adults and 12% of children displayed signs of being addicted to ultra-processed foods, as defined by the Yale Food Addiction Scale.

Those addictions were on the same levels as the ones for alcohol and tobacco, the study found.

"There is converging and consistent support for the validity and clinical relevance of ultra-processed food addiction," Ashley Gearhardt, lead researcher and a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, said in a [press release](#). "By acknowledging that certain types of processed foods have the properties of addictive substances, we may be able to help improve global health."

According to co-author Alexandra DiFeliceantonio, an assistant professor at Virginia Tech University, "Most foods that we think of as natural, or minimally processed, provide energy in the form of carbohydrate or fat—but not both."

DiFeliceantonio also pointed out that while you can give up smoking, drinking or gambling, you can't stop eating.

New Jersey-based dietician Erin Palinski-Wade told Fox News Digital she is skeptical of the findings.

"Although foods rich in added sugar may stimulate the feel-good chemicals in the brain and become habit-forming, sugar itself is not

addictive in the way cocaine or another drug may be," she told Fox.

"Consuming [sugar](#) and then reducing or eliminating it from the diet will not result in [withdrawal symptoms](#) or side effects as would happen from a true addiction," she continued.

"Food cravings are complex and tied into not just the nutrition profile of a food, but also the emotions and learned behaviors around eating."

Some key findings of the analysis, according to the press release, were:

- Ultra-processed foods high in refined carbs and added fats are highly rewarding and may be addictive.
- Behaviors around ultra-processed food might meet the criteria for diagnosis of substance use disorder in some people.
- Understanding these addictive possibilities could lead to new approaches to [clinical care](#) and policy approaches.

"It's essential to understand the addiction to these ultra-processed foods globally, particularly in low- and [middle-income countries](#)," Gearhardt said in the press release, noting how these foods' low cost, convenience and marketing make them more appealing.

"It will take courageous action to change these and other economic and structural factors that drive people towards ultra-processed foods," she concluded.

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