

Ultra-processed foods found to pose risk for respiratory diseases

April 10 2024



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New research by SAHMRI and the University of Adelaide has shown a

diet high in ultra-processed foods (UPF) significantly increases the risk of death from chronic respiratory diseases.

The study, led by Ph.D. Candidate Tefera Mekonnen, and [published](#) in the *European Journal of Nutrition*, collected data from more than 96,000 people living in the United States, across multiple decades, from 1999 to 2018, analyzing the impact of heavily processed [food consumption](#) on a variety of chronic respiratory diseases.

"We found that participants with a diet consisting of more than 40% UPF had a 26% higher risk of dying from [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD) and a 10% higher overall risk of death from chronic respiratory diseases, including [lung cancer](#), chronic bronchitis, emphysema and asthma," Mekonnen said.

"Participants who consumed the largest amount of UPF were typically younger, with a higher BMI and a greater risk of diabetes, emphysema and high blood pressure as well as had lower overall dietary quality."

Examples of ultra-processed foods include chips, chocolate, lollies, biscuits, processed meat, fried chicken, soft drinks, ice cream and more.

"These foods are full of preservatives and additives that get into the bloodstream and may contribute to [oxidative stress](#) and chronic inflammation, exacerbating respiratory conditions," Mekonnen said.

The study is one of the most extensive investigations to date on the impact of ultra-processed foods on respiratory health.

Researchers say they wouldn't expect to find any major differences between the U.S and other Western countries, including Australia, because the populations follow a similar diet.

"Our research suggests that limiting the intake of ultra-processed foods could significantly improve respiratory health and reduce the risk of mortality from [chronic respiratory diseases](#)," Mekonnen said.

Further research is needed to explore the precise mechanisms driving the effects of dietary factors on respiratory health in greater detail.

More information: Tefera Chane Mekonnen et al, Ultra-processed food consumption and risk of chronic respiratory diseases mortality among adults: evidence from a prospective cohort study, *European Journal of Nutrition* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s00394-024-03356-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00394-024-03356-4)

Provided by University of Adelaide

Citation: Ultra-processed foods found to pose risk for respiratory diseases (2024, April 10) retrieved 2 May 2024 from

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