

## To live longer, eat less ultra-processed foods

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*Another study confirms that consuming ultra-processed industrial foods is unhealthy and shortens life expectancy.*

Several industrial foods are ultratransformed, that is to say they are pure synthetic creations made from inexpensive ingredients (fat, sugar, salt) and industrial products unknown in nature (hydrolyzed proteins, hydrogenated oils, modified starches).

Ultra-processed products also contain a variety of additives designed to improve their appearance, taste, texture and shelf life (emulsifiers, stabilizers, texturizers, colors, artificial flavors, synthetic sweeteners). These products are therefore not foods in the usual sense, but rather a combination of ingredients, arranged to give the illusion of food.

### WEIGHT GAIN

The consumption of these ultra-processed foods has increased dramatically over the past few decades and this trend is correlated with a dramatic increase in the number of obese people in the population.

This association is no coincidence, as a clinical study has shown that consuming ultra-processed foods decreases satiety and causes a significant increase in calorie intake, which leads to excess weight (1).

Other studies have also shown that certain additives ubiquitous in these foods (particularly emulsifiers) create inflammation in the gut, which disrupts the composition of the microbiome, increases blood sugar levels and causes excess weight (2).

Since these ultra-processed foods have become one of the main sources of calories for the population in recent years, there is no doubt that these foods contribute to the current obesity epidemic and the high incidence of diseases that result from it.

### WHEN BAD EATING MAKES YOU SICK

The results of a recent Italian study clearly show this negative impact of ultra-processed foods on health (3).

In this study, carried out among 24,325 men and women aged 55 on average and who lived in the region of Molise (southern Italy), the researchers analyzed the daily amount of ultra-processed foods consumed by the participants and, in parallel, listed the premature deaths that affected this population over a period of 8 years.

The main ultra-processed foods consumed by the participants were processed meats (sausages, processed meats), prepared pizzas, pastries, industrial snacks and sugary drinks.

The results clearly show that people who consumed the most of these ultra-processed foods (15% of their total food intake) were much more at risk of dying prematurely than those who ate few (less than 5% of food intake).



For example, the researchers noted a significant increase (52%) in the risk of death from ischemic diseases (heart attack, stroke) as well as an increase in the risk of premature mortality in general, regardless of the cause (increase of 26%).

These adverse effects on cardiovascular health are particularly pronounced in people with risk factors for cardiovascular disease, particularly a history of heart attack or stroke or the presence of type 2 diabetes.

Originally designed to satisfy our natural inclination towards sugar, fat and salt, ultra-processed foods are nonetheless unhealthy products, devoid of essential nutrients, and which promote overweight and the development of serious pathologies.

This is also true for industrial products intended for vegetarians or vegans: like all ultra-processed products, these meatless versions are often made from low quality ingredients and contain sometimes astronomical amounts of sugar, fat, salt and several food additives.

In fact, studies report that vegetarians or vegans who regularly consume these products are at much greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease and dying prematurely (4).

Whether you are omnivorous, vegetarian or vegan, the only way to eat healthy is to eat fresh foods regularly.

- (1) Hall KD et coll. Ultra-processed diets cause excess calorie intake and weight gain: an inpatient randomized controlled trial of ad libitum food intake. *Cell Metab.* 2019; 30: 67-77.e3.
- (2) Laster J and LA Frame. Beyond the calories—is the problem in the processing? *Curr Treat Opt Gastroenterol.* 2019; 17: 577-586.
- (3) Bonaccio M and coll. Ultra-processed food consumption is associated with increased risk of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality in the Moli-sani Study. *Am J Clin Nutr* (published online, December 20<sup>th</sup>).
- (4) Satija A and coll. Healthful and unhealthful plant-based diets and the risk of coronary heart disease in US adults. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2017; 70: 411-422.