

Nutrition Fact Check Ultra-Processed Foods

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You've probably heard the term ultra processed foods a lot recently, everywhere from social media to the news to conversations with friends and family.

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But what are ultra processed foods?

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I'm Caroline Passerello, registered dietitian nutritionist and a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

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The Nova classification system defines ultra processed foods as industrial formulations composed of refined ingredients, additives, and minimal to no Whole Foods, meaning a wide variety of foods are considered ultra processed.

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The system classifies foods by processing level from unprocessed to ultra processed without considering nutrient content.

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From this definition, foods considered ultra processed include canned vegetables, tofu, soy milk, Greek yogurt, and breakfast cereals in addition to many others.

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While this system may have been helpful for its original intent, it oversimplified a very complex and nuanced topic and doesn't even account for nutrient composition of the foods.

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Consumption of ultra processed foods makes up more than 50% of total calorie intake in the United States.

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Avoiding ultra processed foods is not realistic or necessary, but reducing those that are high in sugars, sodium, and saturated fat while increasing those that are nutrient dense like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is recommended.

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Health associations with ultra processed foods are often unclear due to studies.

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Not fully adjusting for lifestyle factors, Nutrient quality, or overall dietary patterns makes it challenging to determine specific aspects of ultra processed foods that may be responsible for health effects.

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Everyone's dietary needs are different.

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To ensure you get a nutrition plan tailored to your health needs, see a registered dietitian nutritionist and for more information on ultra processed foods, visit eatrightpro.org/NutritionFactCheck.