

7 Reasons You Should Stop Eating Ultra-Processed Foods

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People often ask me “what are the first dietary steps I can take to be healthier?” I like to take a positive approach first and tell them what foods they could ADD vs. what foods they should TAKE OUT of their diet. When I suggest foods to remove, I always answer: ultra-processed foods.

Ultra-processed foods are those foods that have gone through ‘multiple processing steps’ and have had sugar and/or fat plus artificial flavors and preservatives added. A few examples of ultra-processed foods include most breakfast cereals, chips, candy, chicken nuggets, most fast food items and soda.

Many studies are showing that ultra-processed foods are quite detrimental to your health and should be avoided most of the time.

Here are 7 reasons you should stop eating these ultra-processed foods:

1. Your weight – A recent study showed that people who were given unlimited processed foods for a 2 week period consumed an average of 508 calories per day more than another group that were eating unlimited whole foods (unprocessed) for a 2 week period. The people eating the highly processed food diet gained, on average 2 pounds in 2 weeks while those eating more of a whole, unprocessed diet lost around 2 pounds in 2 weeks. Not only did those people eating highly processed foods eat more they also ate everything faster.

2. Your digestion and your metabolism - Around 10% of our daily expenditure of calories is used digesting and absorbing our food. Processed foods take less energy to digest than whole, less processed foods. A recent study found that people eating highly processed foods used up, on average, around 64 less calories per meal to digest their food than those eating a whole, mostly unprocessed diet. That means that, on average, you could burn up almost 200 extra calories per day by eating a whole foods, unprocessed diet.

3. Your heart – Two recent studies show how ultra processed foods can affect your heart health. One study found that for every 10% increase in the amount of ultra-processed foods eaten, your risk of ‘heart attack, stroke, or other serious cardiovascular event’ increased by 12%! The other study found that ‘people who ate more than four servings of ultra-processed foods daily had a 62% higher risk of dying from all causes, compared with those who ate only two servings per day.’

4. Your blood sugar and diabetes – People who eat an ultra-processed diet are much more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. A study out last year showed that of those eating the most processed foods, 166 out of every 100,000 developed diabetes compared to 116 out of 100,000 for those who ate the least amount of processed foods.

5. Your real food intake – Remember eating those wax candies with the liquid inside when you were a kid? They were fun to eat sure, but was there a part of you that thought, “this doesn’t even taste real?” That’s because much of that liquid was made in a lab and actually wasn’t real food at all. I often tell people I work with that they shouldn’t eat anything that was made in a lab. Ultra-processed foods are full of ingredients that are used as preservatives or chemicals that are created to increase your cravings. If you can, stay away from these foods like the plague!

6. Your fiber intake – Ultra-processed foods are usually lower in fiber than whole, minimally processed foods. A low fiber diet can make you gain weight, increase your risk of cardiovascular disease, constipation, hemorrhoids, diverticular disease, colon cancer and abnormal gut flora.

7. Your wellbeing – People that I have worked with on their nutrition who have switched from an ultra-processed diet to more of a whole foods diet usually say they feel better within days. Our bodies can change quickly and some healing can happen almost immediately.

If you eat a lot of processed foods, but don’t know where to begin to eat healthier, I have included some websites below that may be helpful to you. Enjoy!

Love and Olive Oil - loveandoliveoil.com – An unprocessed, plant-based blog with easy to make recipes.

Running on Real Food - runningonrealfood.com – A wonderful blog if you want to try out the vegan diet.

Simply Recipes - simplyrecipes.com – Delicious recipes using whole foods.

