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THE KNOWLEDGE DOC®

JUNK FOOD

The Truth About Ultra-Processed Food





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The Truth About Ultra-Processed Food

Learn how junk food affects health and well-being and how to spot the top four dangerous hidden ultra-processed food ingredients in everyday food.





Ultra: Beyond what is ordinary; excessively, extremely

Processed: Having been subjected to high heat, pressure, and chemicals to extract and remove natural components

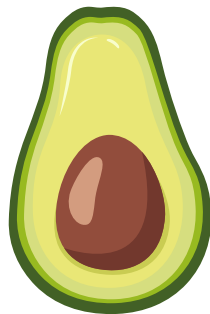
Food: That which is eaten to sustain life, provide energy, and promote the growth and repair of tissues

What Are Ultra-Processed Foods?

Ultra-processed foods (UPF) cannot sustain life, provide sustained energy nor can they promote the growth and repair of tissues. Ultra-processed food is not food.

They are designed to have a long shelf life and be highly profitable, convenient, and addictive—but lack required nutrients.

Unprocessed



Ultra-Processed





Different Degrees of Processing

Stage 1



Apple

Stage 2



Applesauce

Stage 3



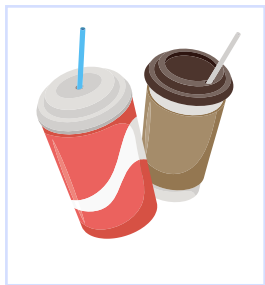
Canned Apple in Glucose Syrup

Stage 4

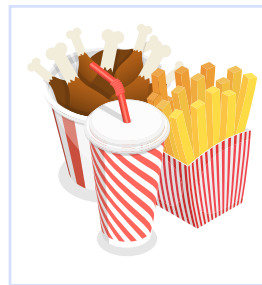


Apple-Flavored Pop Tarts with Icing

Common Ultra-Processed Foods



Sugar-sweetened beverages



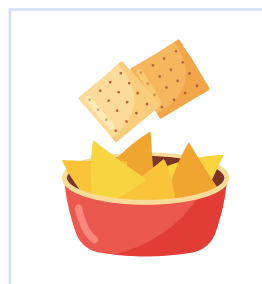
Fast food



Frozen dinners



Sweets



Snacks



Cereal



The Four Most Used UPF Ingredients



1. Ultra-processed starch

Also known as:

- Modified corn starch
- Modified food starch
- Corn starch
- Maltodextrin
- Dextrin



2. Ultra-processed seed oil

Also known as:

- Vegetable oil
- Corn oil
- Soy oil
- Canola oil
- Cottonseed oil
- Margarine



3. Ultra-processed sugar

Also known as:

- Glucose/glucose syrup
- Corn syrup/high-fructose corn syrup
- Dextrose



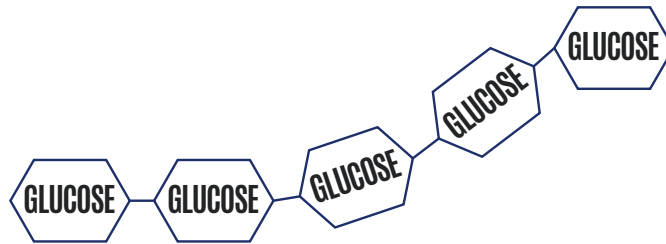
4. Ultra-processed protein

Also known as:

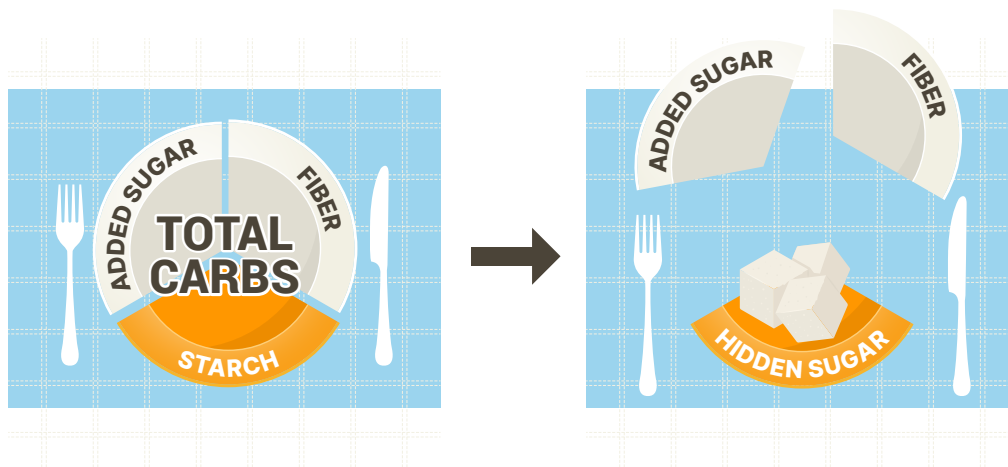
- Soy protein isolate
- Vegetable textured protein
- Gluten
- Casein/milk protein



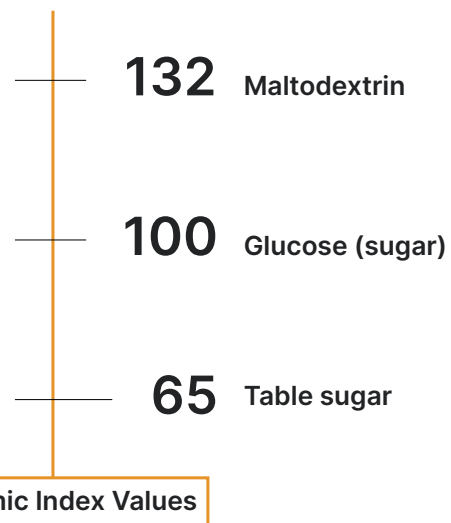
Starch Is HIDDEN SUGAR



When you look at a food's total carbohydrate content on the nutrition label, you'll see fiber and added sugar listed underneath. If you subtract the fiber and added sugar from the total carbs, you get the starch content, which is essentially hidden sugar.



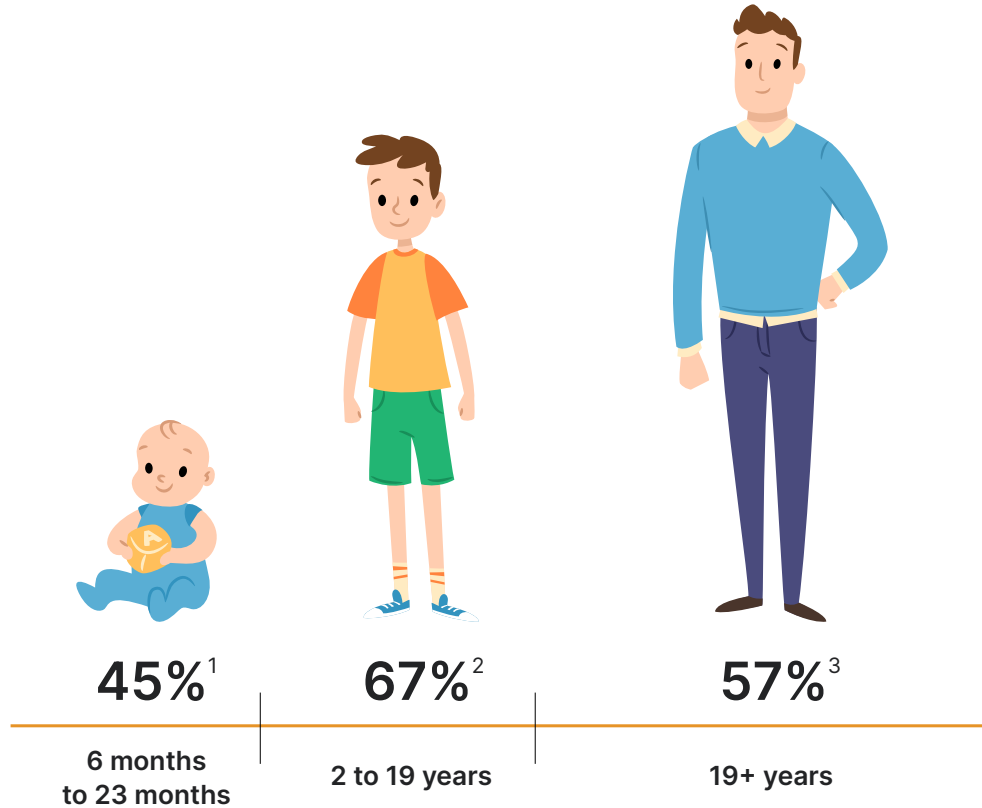
These modified starches have been heavily processed with heat and chemicals. This makes them structurally similar to table sugar without having to be declared on the label despite them raising blood sugar levels more significantly than pure glucose.





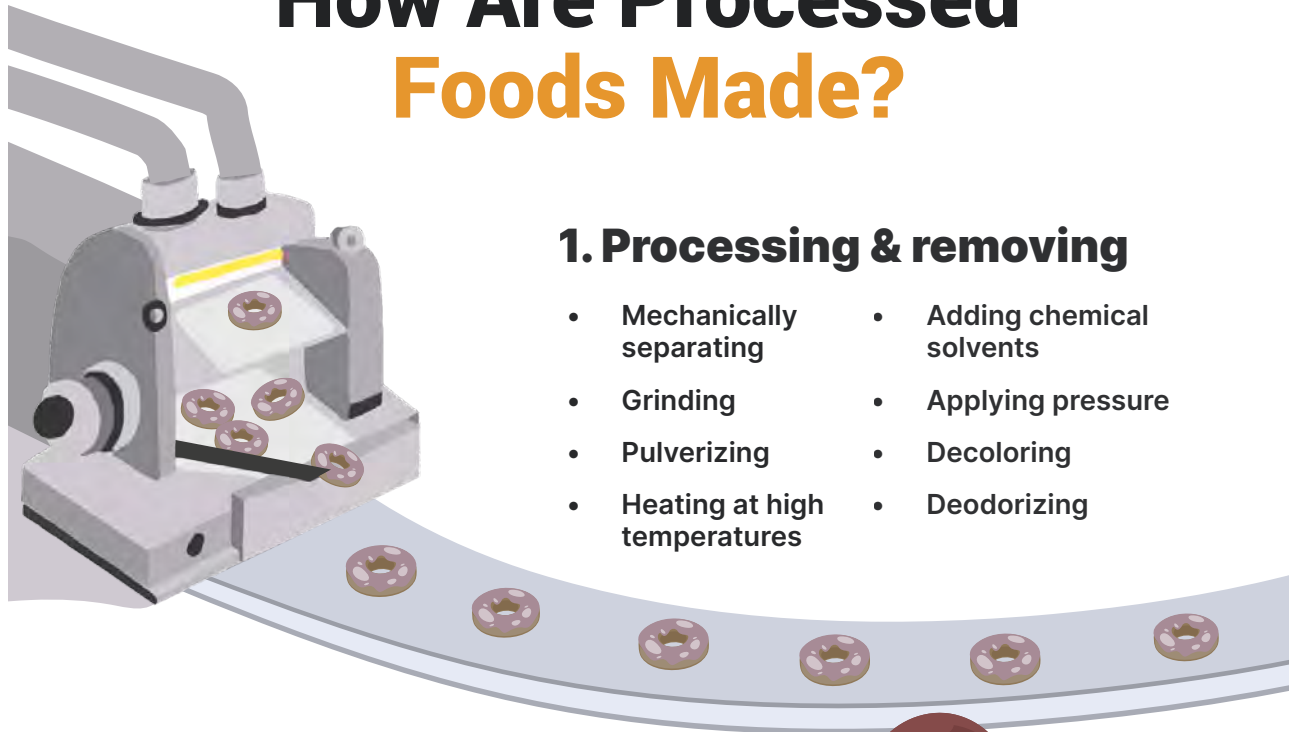
How Much of Your Diet Is Ultra-Processed?

(Based on the average American diet)





How Are Processed Foods Made?



1. Processing & removing

- Mechanically separating
- Grinding
- Pulverizing
- Heating at high temperatures
- Adding chemical solvents
- Applying pressure
- Decoloring
- Deodorizing

2. Adding

- Flavorings
- Sweeteners
- Flavor enhancers
- Texturizers
- Colorings
- Synthetic vitamins
- Preservatives and stabilizers



Processing removes crucial nutrients

- ✗ Fiber
- ✗ Vitamins
- ✗ Minerals
- ✗ Trace elements
- ✗ Phytonutrients
- ✗ Antioxidants
- ✗ Enzymes
- ✗ Beneficial microbes



The Dark Side of Corn

- Corn products like high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and maltodextrin contribute to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes due to poor nutrition and high glycemic index.
- Most UPFs come from GMO dent corn, inedible for humans in its natural state but used for animal feed and processed foods.
- Taxpayer-funded subsidies for corn benefit food manufacturers, who profit by turning cheap corn into harmful UPFs.
- Corn oils, high in omega-6 fats, promote inflammation and are linked to autoimmune disorders, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, and cancer.
- About 99% of U.S. corn is GMO, often with pesticide residues tied to allergies, fertility issues, liver damage, and more.
- Cheap corn-derived ingredients are hidden in everyday products like dressings, soups, sauces, and baby formula.

Taxpayers end up paying for UPFs three times

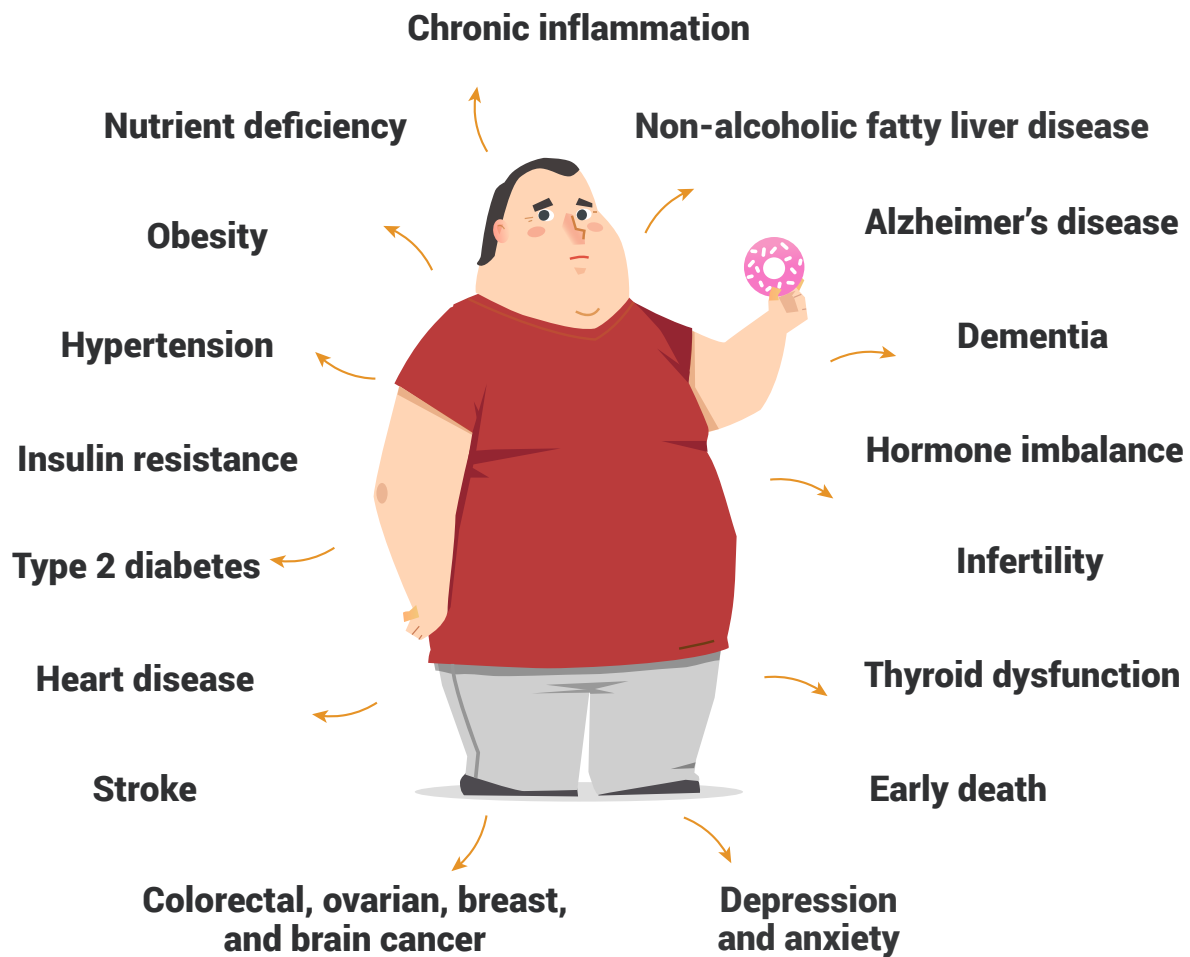
1. Tax-funded subsidies to corn farmers
2. Buying ultra-processed corn products
3. Medical care costs due to health issues linked to UPFs

Common ultra-processed corn products

- Corn chips
- Tortillas
- Cornmeal
- High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS)
- Glucose syrup
- Cornstarch
- Modified cornstarch
- Maltodextrin
- Corn oil



Health Effects of Ultra-Processed Foods



Did you know?

Ultra-processed food consumption contributes to 10.5% of all premature deaths.⁶

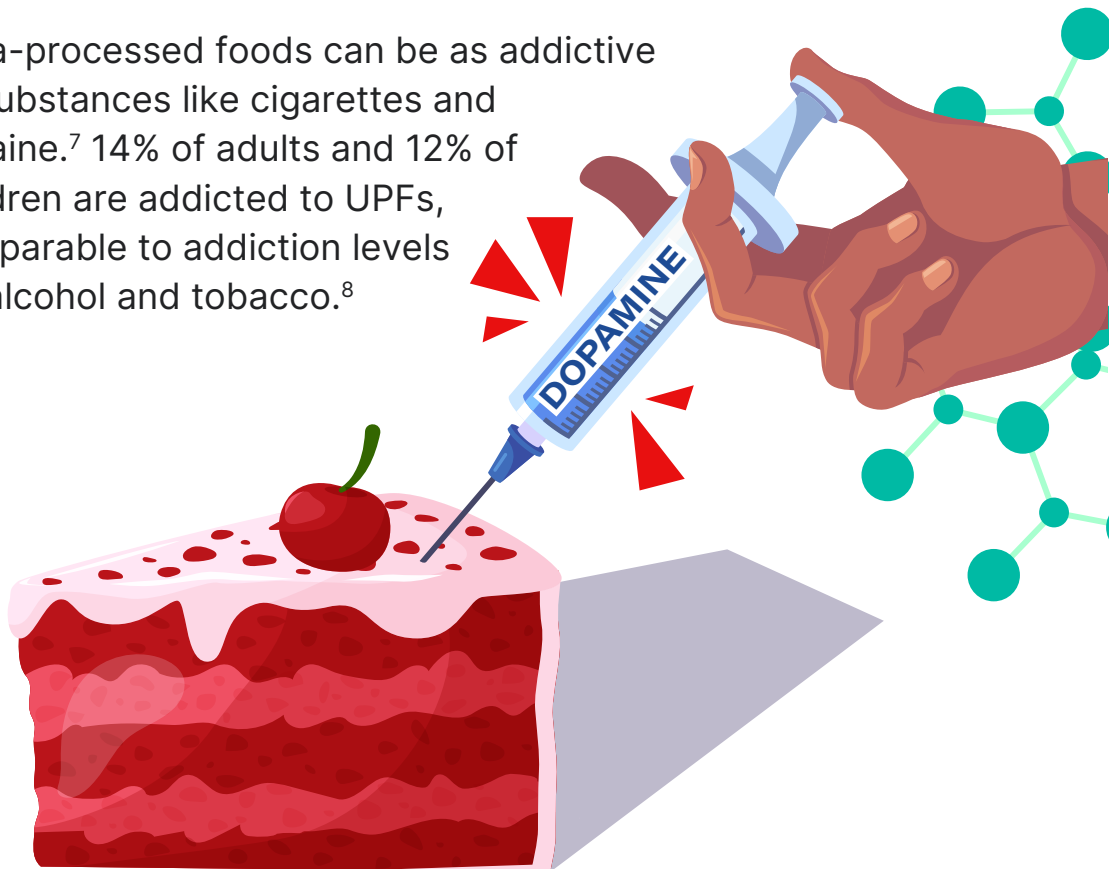


Why Are **Ultra-Processed Foods** Addictive?

Food chemists engineer complex flavors and textures to produce highly addictive foods. UPFs target the brain's reward zone, causing an instant release of dopamine—the happy hormone. This is why you can't stop eating after you start.

A critical concept in this engineering is the "bliss point," which is the precise combination of ultra-processed sugar, ultra-processed seed oil, and salt that maximizes pleasure and keeps you coming back for more.

Ultra-processed foods can be as addictive as substances like cigarettes and cocaine.⁷ 14% of adults and 12% of children are addicted to UPFs, comparable to addiction levels for alcohol and tobacco.⁸





No One Eats Just One Serving Size

All information in the nutritional facts section on a food label is based on one serving, but the average person eats at least 2 to 4 times the serving size.

Misleading serving sizes on UPF labels hide their true carb and calorie count.

How many carbs and calories are you really consuming if you measure out each serving?

Serving Size
on Label



1¹/₃ cup

150 Cal
12 g Sugar
34 g Carbs

Typical
Portion



2²/₃ cup

300 Cal
24 g Sugar
68 g Carbs



Why Do UPF Cravings Never Stop?

On average, people on a high ultra-processed food diet consume 500 more calories a day than those on a healthy, whole-food diet.⁹

Here's why:

- 1 UPFs—including high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS)—can't effectively trigger hormones that make you feel full or reduce hormones that cause hunger, which fuels appetite and causes continuous cravings.^{10 11}
- 2 The Dorito Effect happens when ultra-processed seed oils and MSG are used to amplify sensation, which tricks the brain into making these low-quality foods taste amazing. MSG isn't sugar, but it can make you gain weight by interfering with your appetite and making you eat more. Scientists even use MSG to make mice gain weight in obesity studies!¹²
- 3 UPFs usually lack natural protein, which is essential for our bodies. Humans, animals, and even insects keep eating until they get enough protein—a concept called the Protein Leverage Effect. When we eat UPFs that are low in protein, our bodies don't feel satisfied, so we just keep eating more and more



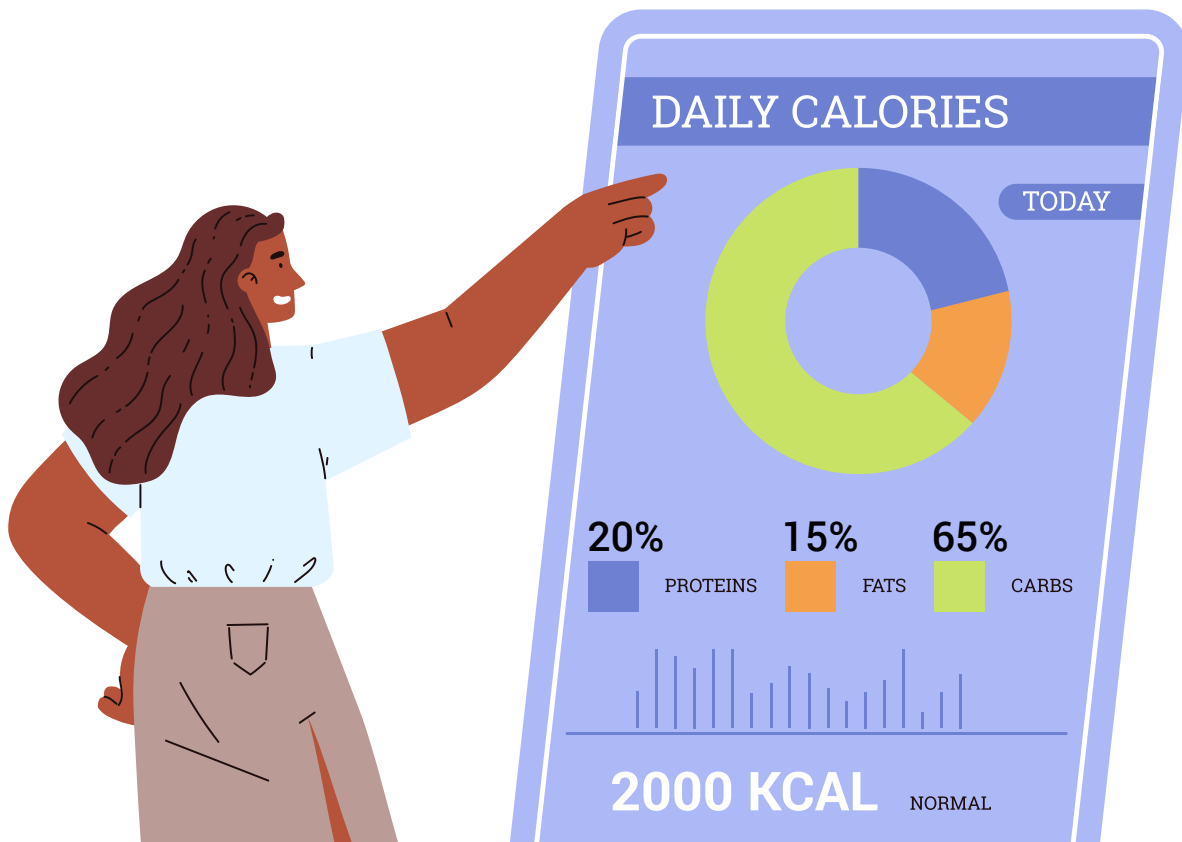


Not All Calories Are the Same

Clever marketing campaigns make you believe that a “calorie is a calorie,” suggesting that there is no difference.

This lets UPF manufacturers downplay the health effects of harmful ingredients, implying that there is no good or bad food—and as long as you eat everything in moderation, it's okay.

But that's far from true! The nutritional value and quality of those calories really matters and can greatly impact your health and well-being.





Misleading and Misreading Labels

When reading a food label, focus on the ingredients more than on the nutritional facts.

Here's why: If we look at the labels **A** and **B** below, it's obvious that **A** looks like the healthier option.

A

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Avocado	201g
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 322	Calories from fat 245
% Daily Value	
Total Fat 29g	45%
Saturated Fat 4g	21%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0g	0%
Sodium 12mg	1%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 13g	54%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 4g	
Vitamin A	6%
Vitamin C	33%
Calcium	2%
Iron	6%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.



29g Total Fat **8g**

4g Saturated Fat **1g**

17g Carbohydrates **16g**

1g Sugars **0g**

B

Nutrition Facts	
Información Nutricional	
About 18 servings per container / Aprox. 18 porciones por bolsa	
Serving size / Tamaño de una porción	
About 14 pieces / Aprox. 14 piezas (28g)	
Amount per serving / Cantidad por porción	
Calories / Calorías	150
% Daily Value* / % Valor Diario*	
Total Fat / Grasa Total 8g	10%
Saturated Fat / Grasa Saturada 1g	5%
Trans Fat / Grasa Trans 0g	
Cholesterol / Colesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium / Sodio 140mg	6%
Total Carbohydrate / Carbohidratos Totales 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber / Fibra Dietética 1g	5%
Total Sugars / Azúcares Totales 0g	
Protein / Proteína 2g	
Vitamin D / Vitamina D 0mcg	0%
Calcium / Calcio 40mg	2%
Iron / Hierro 0.3mg	0%
Potassium / Potasio 70mg	0%

Not a significant source of added sugars.
No es una fuente significativa de azúcares añadidos.

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.
*El porcentaje valor diario (VD) le indica cuánto un nutriente en una cantidad de alimentos contribuye a una dieta diaria. Se utiliza 2,000 calorías al día como recomendación general de nutrición.



INGREDIENTS: CORN, VEGETABLE OIL (CORN, CANOLA, AND/OR SUNFLOWER OIL), AND LESS THAN 2% OF MALTODEXTRIN (MADE FROM CORN), SALT, CHEDDAR CHEESE (MILK, CHEESE CULTURES, SALT, ENZYMES), WHEY, MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE, NATURAL & ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS, CITRIC ACID, YEAST EXTRACT, ONION POWDER, ARTIFICIAL COLOR (RED 40 LAKE, YELLOW 6 LAKE, YELLOW 6, YELLOW 5), BUTTERMILK, ROMANO CHEESE (COW'S MILK, CHEESE CULTURES, SALT, ENZYMES), POTASSIUM SALT, WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, SPICES, DEXTROSE, TOMATO POWDER, LACTOSE, SKIM MILK, SUGAR, GARLIC POWDER, LACTIC ACID, DISODIUM INOSINATE, AND DISODIUM GUANYLATE. CONTAINS MILK INGREDIENTS.

If you don't read the ingredients, you can't fully understand the nutrition facts.



Spotting Dangerous Ingredients on Food Labels

OREO Cookies



INGREDIENTS:

Unbleached Enriched Flour (Wheat Flour, Niacin, Reduced Iron, Thiamine Mononitrate, Riboflavin, Folic Acid), Sugar, Palm and/or Canola Oil, Cocoa (Processed with Alkali), High-Fructose Corn Syrup, Leavening (Baking Soda and/or Calcium Phosphate), Salt, Soy Lecithin, Chocolate, Artificial Flavor.

FROOT LOOPS Cereals



INGREDIENTS:

Sugar, Corn Flour Blend (Whole Grain Yellow Corn Flower, Degerminated Yellow Corn Flour), Wheat Flour, Whole Grain Oat Flour, Oat Fiber, Soluble Corn Fiber, Contains 2% or Less of Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (Coconut, Soybean, and/or Cottonseed), Salt, Red 40, Natural Flavor, Blue 2, Turmeric Color, Yellow 6, Annatto Color, Blue 1, BHT for Freshness. Vitamins and Minerals: Reduced Iron, Zinc Oxide, Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine Hydrochloride), Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin), Vitamin B1 (Thiamine Hydrochloride), Vitamin A Palmitate, Folic Acid, Vitamin D, Vitamin B12.

Doritos Tortilla Chips



INGREDIENTS:

Corn, Vegetable Oil (Sunflower, Canola, and/or Corn Oil), Maltodextrin (Made from Corn), and Less Than 2% of the Following: Salt, Cheddar Cheese (Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes), Whey, Monosodium Glutamate, Buttermilk, Romano Cheese (Part-Skim Cow's Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes), Whey Protein Concentrate, Onion Powder, Corn Flour, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Dextrose, Tomato Powder, Lactose, Spices, Artificial Color (Yellow 6, Yellow 5, Red 40), Lactic Acid, Citric Acid, Sugar, Garlic Powder, Skim Milk, Red and Green Bell Pepper Powder, Disodium Inosinate, Disodium Guanylate, Potassium Chloride, and Sodium Caseinate. **Contains Milk Ingredients.**

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Decoding UPF Ingredient Secrets

The food industry uses clever tactics to camouflage dangerous ingredients by giving them complex chemical names.

Very few people bother to decipher what they mean. It's like a secret code only the food industry understands.

For example, maltodextrin, dextrin, polydextrose, and modified starch are all essentially chains of glucose molecules. They try to disguise these UPF ingredients as “harmless” carbs—but they are actually added sugar.





The Keys to **Avoiding UPFs**

- Always check the ingredients list
- Avoid ultra-processed starches, ultra-processed seed oils, ultra-processed sugars, and ultra-processed proteins
- Look for sneaky alternative UPF ingredient names
- Research ingredients you're not sure about using our UPF Glossary
- Get the 4 Dangerous Ingredients to Avoid Wallet Cutout Card to take with you on the go

Tip: If most of the ingredients on a food label sound like they belong in a science experiment, then it's an ultra-processed food.

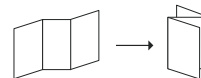


WALLET CUTOUT CARD

4 Dangerous Ingredients to Avoid

1. Ultra-processed sugars	2. Ultra-processed starches	3. Ultra-processed seed oils	4. Ultra-processed proteins
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glucose and glucose syrup• Corn syrup• High-fructose corn syrup• Dextrose• Maltose• Molasses• Agave• Fruit nectar• Juice concentrate• Brown rice syrup• Beet syrup• Corn sweetener	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corn• Modified corn starch• Modified food starch• Corn starch• Corn syrup solids• Corn flour• Maltodextrin• Potato flour• Wheat and wheat flour• Rice flour• Tapioca flour• Dextrin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vegetable oil• Corn oil• Soybean oil• Canola oil• Cottonseed oil• Sunflower oil• Peanut oil• Safflower oil• Rice bran oil• Margarine• Hydrogenated oils• Partially hydrogenated oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soy protein isolate• Hydrolyzed soy protein• Soy protein• Wheat gluten• Hydrolyzed soy isolate• Textured vegetable protein• Hydrolyzed corn protein• Sodium caseinate• Casein protein• Milk protein isolate• Milk protein concentrate• Hydrolyzed casein

Cut out and keep in your wallet to stay on top of tricky food labels



Get the 4 Dangerous Ingredients to Avoid
Wallet Cutout Card to Take with You on the Go



10 TIPS For Transitioning off Junk Food

- Don't allow UPFs in the house—there's less temptation if they're out of reach.
- Replace UPFs with healthy pleasure foods.
- It only takes three days for cravings to go away after ditching “junk food,” remind yourself of this when they hit.
- Get the whole family on board.
- Bring healthy “junk food” alternatives to family events and social gatherings.
- Educate yourself on nutrient-dense foods, so you know what to keep on hand.
- Create a healthy shopping list before you go to the store—and stick to it.
- Remind yourself of the mental and physical effects “junk food” has on your body.
- Use intermittent fasting to reduce cravings and snacking.
- Stay inspired by learning about the benefits of whole foods.



Sources

¹[https://jn.nutrition.org/article/S0022-3166\(23\)72425-5/abstract](https://jn.nutrition.org/article/S0022-3166(23)72425-5/abstract)

²<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2782866>

³<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34647997/>

⁴<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9772031/>

⁵<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8340456/>

⁶<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379722004299>

⁷<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7694501/>

⁸<https://www.bmj.com/content/383/bmj-2023-075354>

⁹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7946062/>

¹⁰<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0002916522038837>

¹¹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5486123/>

¹²<https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10217200/>



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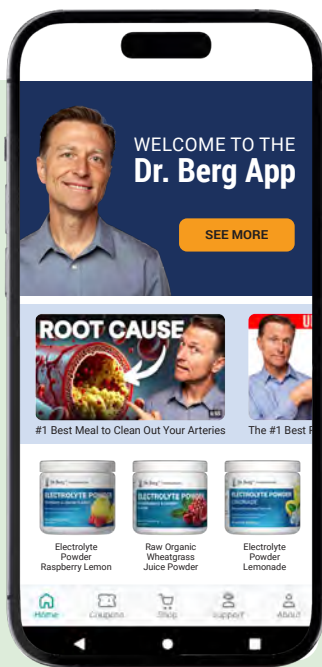
Explore our free apps and website for wellness tools at your fingertips

4.8
★ 2.57K

Dr. Berg Junk Food Meter

Make informed food choices with the tap of a button

The Dr. Berg Junk Food Meter app helps you spot harmful ingredients, ultra-processed additives, and hidden sugars—right from your phone.



5.0
★ 2.46K

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