New Studies Show Ultra-processed Foods Lead To More Hunger, Obesity, Cancer

In a new study, volunteers had their food consumption monitored for a month. When they ate “ultra-processed food,” they consumed 500 more calories a day compared to when they ate unprocessed foods.

Ultra-processed foods have become the staple of our modern diet in the U.S. These foods make up 57.9% of food consumed in the United States. Ultra-processed foods are made with cheap industrial ingredients. They’re high in fat (typically trans fats), refined sugars, and refined salt. They are typically made with wheat, genetically modified corn, and genetically modified soy, and the foods almost test high in glyphosates. Organic foods can also be ultra-processed. The US National Institutes of Health believes ultra-processed foods affect hunger hormones in the body, leading people to eat more than they otherwise would.

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The study was conducted by researchers at the National Institutes of Health. It’s said to be the first randomized, controlled study to show eating ultra-processed foods causes people to eat more and gain weight.

There are debates about what should define an “ultra-processed food” but lead researcher Dr Kevin Hall said is quoted as saying [it’s like] “…pornography – it’s hard to define but you know it when you see it”. BBC listed what they consider to be ultra-processed foods:

- Mass-produced packaged breads and buns
- Sweet or savoury packaged snacks including crisps

- Chocolate bars and sweets
- Sodas and sweetened drinks
- Meatballs, poultry and fish nuggets
- Instant noodles and soups
- Frozen or shelf-life ready meals
- Foods made mostly or entirely from sugar, oils and fats

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The study had twenty people live in a laboratory for a month. For two weeks half of the team consumed ultra-processed meals and the other half were given unprocessed meals. The diets were switched for last two weeks of the study. The participants ate as much food as they wanted. Researchers monitored what they ate.

Participants on the ultra-processed diet averaged 508 calories more per day and gained an average of 2 pounds over the two-week period. People on the unprocessed diet lost about 2 pounds on average throughout the two-week period.

In February of 2018 French researchers suggested a link between highly processed foods and cancer. A research team at the Universite Sorbonne Paris Cite took food surveys to find out what foods people were consuming. The participants were followed for an average of five years.

The results showed that for a 10% increase in ultra-processed food consumption cancer diagnosis increased by 12%.