

*Opinion Article*

## Alert: Ultra-processed Food Is Overwhelming American's Diet

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### Abstract

The massive consumption of ultra-processed foods in the United States warrants greater public awareness and regulatory changes. Statistics show that the portion of ultra-processed foods in Americans' diet is high. Multiple factors contribute to this huge intake, including the appealing characteristics of ultra-processed foods and consumers with inadequate nutritional understanding. Public health problems are closely linked with the consumption of ultra-processed food with traceable evidence. To deal with this massive consumption, two options are provided. One is imposing taxes on ultra-processed food producers. The other is to provide formative labeling. Government engagement is critical at this time and more effective actions are required.

**Keywords:** ultra-processed food, public health, government engagement

### 1. Introduction

People in the United States consume far too much ultra-processed food (UPF), which can lead to numerous health hazards, including cancer, dyslipidemia, and Alzheimer's disease. Immediate actions are required to tackle this public health problem. Two potential solutions are provided in the literature. One is using government authorities to tax the process sectors of UPF to reduce consumers' amount of consumption of that kind of food. Another approach is for the US federal government to promote rules on informed labeling so that consumers can improve their nutrient knowledge and make healthier decisions.

According to Steele et al. (2016), UPFs are "industrial formulations which besides salt, sugar, oils, and fats, include substances not used in culinary preparations". The current state of affairs in the United States reveals that Americans consume far too much UPF (Welch, 2016). UPFs are devoured at an incredible rate. People are fascinated with them, and few comprehend how risky their actions are. Huehnergarth's team (2016) found that UPFs provide over 60% of calories and 90% of excess sugar to Americans' daily diet. In fact, one study demonstrates that UPFs have largely supplanted Americans' food systems and eating habits (Moodie, et al., 2013). Clearly, they occupy a prominent position on the American table and also have a direct association with the health of Americans.

### 2. Analysis of Issue Causation & Potential Risks

Why are UPFs so popular in the United States? UPFs, on the one hand, are intended to entice purchasers. UPFs are simple to reach people's happiness points due to their delectable look, enticing aroma, and savory flavor. People's hearts are won by UPFs, which create a strong link with customers and products. Similarly, people regard UPFs as privileges because of their ready-to-eat qualities and high shelf-life (Kirkpatrick, 2019). Furthermore, the enticement of UPFs leads people to crave more. The human brain is accustomed to obtaining calories from sweet foods, however, the calorific reward provided by UPFs is insufficient to satisfy the brain. This process works the same way as an addiction, and it can lead to a vicious cycle (Alliance for Natural Health International, 2018). Alissa Rumsey, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, mentions that UPFs can be consumed mindlessly. To put it another way, UPFs cause individuals to consume over their limits without even realizing it.

Many Americans, on the other hand, misinterpret the notion of UPFs due to a lack of nutritional expertise. Some people believe that the sugar added to UPFs comes from beet or cane sugar (Boseley, 2013). People are unable to

distinguish between UPFs and other types of food in this instance and are therefore unable to perceive distinct risks in UPFs. In addition, Americans are less inclined to prepare food and learn the technique of cooking cuisine, with the condition that only a tiny amount of food consumers find pleasure in cooking (Yoon, 2017). People cannot readily break their dependency on UPFs because of a lack of culinary skills and enthusiasm. Lastly, not having critical judgment, people are more likely to believe in so-called healthy rules. Many consumers are unaware that certain dietary advice is not based on scientific evidence. Plenty of food guidelines are merely products of dominant influential food companies (Gustin, 2016). As can be seen, both UPF features and societal factors have a role in the widespread consumption of UPFs.

Among other things like obesity, allergy, heart disease, and Type 2 diabetes, UPFs also contribute to cancer, dyslipidemia, and Alzheimer's. To begin with, several pieces of research show a strong correlation between UPFs and cancer (Boseley, 2018). UPFs are abundant in acrylamides and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, both of which elevate cancer risks in humans when extruded at high temperatures (Mastrangelo, Fadda & Marzia, 1996). Secondly, Lisa R. Young, an adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University, states that dyslipidemia will attack people if they consume too much UPFs, which contain a great amount of added sugar, salt, and fat (Miller, 2018). Finally, scientists discover that when people ingest UPFs, polysaccharides in meals break down, producing an increase in blood sugar levels. As a result, the chance of Alzheimer's disease is increased (Kandimalla, Thirumala, & Reddy, 2016).

### 3. Review of Plausible Resolutions

To address this issue, the US government should prioritize restricting the widespread usage of UPF. A research report at New York University (2018) argues that the government targeting UPF manufacturers with fiscal disincentives is successful. According to Belluz (2018), Mexico and Hungary followed this strategy and have had positive outcomes since public health has been promoted. Recent data showed that Mexicans and Hungarians decrease their intake of UPFs after their government-imposed junk food taxes. Specifically, when applying a tax to food processors, the shelf price goes up accordingly. Seeing the elevating price, consumers will be less inclined to purchase the food. In this sense, the governments may utilize tax to regulate the amount of people's consumption of unhealthy food. Moreover, with the additional revenue, the governments will be able to spend more money on social health causes. Some people criticize this policy, fearing that the levy would be passed on to consumers. According to Jennifer Pomeranz, an assistant professor of Public Health Policy and Management at New York University's College of Global Public Health, taxing food manufacturers will not harm consumers any more than a sales tax would; instead, it will only have a direct impact on consumers' choices because the taxes will not be applied to the entire product (Weintraub, 2018). Consequently, consumers will seek out better eating options and healthier food choices.

To support this first policy and broaden its reach, Mozaffarian, Angell, Lang, and Rivera (2018) point out that the American government should implement policy to encourage more informative point-of-purchase labeling, which is a constructive and propitious idea. One study carried out by Acton, Vanderlee, and Hammond (2018) suggest that front-of-package labels communicate healthy messages efficiently and create a positive influence on consumers' choice. Food labels list the quantity of sugar, fat, protein, salt, and fiber in each item, providing individuals with the fundamental nutritional and quality information of food. They act as a crucial tool in building consumers' healthy diets (Ariyawardana, 2011). By virtue of reading the list, people can better evaluate the nutrition of food and understand how many particular nutrients they will ingest (The American Heart Association, 2017). Therefore, customers may make better food decisions when they have more information about their options.

What's more, it is advised that health warnings be placed on commodities such as cigarettes and alcohol. The results of a 2018 University of Melbourne study manifest that negative warning labels are useful in improving people's self-control and selection abilities (Johnson, 2019). When it comes to UPFs, being aware of how harmful these foods can be is helpful for people to curb their desires towards UPF temptations. Most significantly, the great advantage of this policy is that not only will consumers become less likely to buy UPFs, but food producers will be driven to supply healthier products as well (Mozaffarian & Shangquan, 2019). The preference for nutritional education via food labels show the implications of government involvement.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of massive consumption of UPF is serious in the USA, on account of the desirable attributes of UPF that appeal to naive consumers and American citizens' current diet which is insufficient to support them to make wholesome food options. Separate research regarding food and health point to the

relationship between UPF and diseases, containing obesity, allergy, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, dyslipidemia, and Alzheimer's.

In order to combat this knotty problem, two recently proposed remedies stand out in the literature. The resolutions are consist of government authorities levying fees on UPF processors and emphasizing UPF labeling together with nutritional education. Noted that foods are supposed to serve people, but people are going through a perilous moment, so the situation is becoming reversed as time goes on. Given the current scenario, it is time for the US government to denounce rather than condone the adverse tendency. Recognizing the severe problem is the first step but putting the thoughts into action is a crucial stage to finally tackle the issue.

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