

What is ultra-processed food?

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Ultra-processed food can become the go-to diet for people on the run, as they sacrifice nutrition for convenience.

A recent study found that a diet high in ultra-processed [food](#) raises the risk of colorectal cancer in men. And in another study, researchers

determined that [adults](#) with the lowest-quality [diet](#) who eat the highest amount of ultra-processed food have an increased risk for [cardiovascular disease](#) and death.

But what is ultra-processed food?

Take a walk down any grocery aisle, and you'll likely see plenty of ultra-processed foods.

"We might think of it as a novelty-type food—something that doesn't resemble how a food might look in nature," says Kate Zeratsky, a Mayo Clinic registered dietitian nutritionist.

Think of food as three simple categories. Unprocessed, whole foods are things like fresh fruits and vegetables, rice, meat, and eggs. Processed food covers a wide gamut and includes cheeses, canned vegetables with added salt, canned fruit with added sugar and meat preserved with salt. And ultra-processed foods can have added colors, sugars, salts and preservatives that add no [nutritional value](#).

"These foods probably don't represent whole types of foods," says Zeratsky. "They probably have a different appearance, and an example might be a cheese curl."

Others? Snack cakes, chicken nuggets, soda, chips, frozen dinners, the list goes on. Convenient and palatable? Yes. Nutritious? Not so much.

"So in our busy lifestyle, instead of turning to ultra-processed foods, think of more wholesome canned or frozen foods," says Zeratsky.

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