

Ultra-Processed Foods (UPF)

The global rise in ultra-processed foods is a significant health concern as they are linked to numerous health risks, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and mental health disorders.

What are Ultra-Processed Foods and why are they a concern?

- UPF are foods that have been greatly changed from their natural form and may include ingredients not available to home cooks.
- UPF are high in calories from added sugars, unhealthy fats, sodium, and preservatives. But ultra-processed foods are low in nutrition.
- The preservatives in UPF mean they are shelf stable and attractive to stores.
- UPF are often lower cost than whole foods despite higher food transportation costs.
- UPF are often more accessible in rural and remote communities, when access to fresh or minimally processed foods may be limited.
- **Limited access to affordable, nutritious foods can make it difficult for people to eat well and maintain health.**

Do Ultra-Processed Foods impact your health?

Research from multiple countries has indicated that the consumption UPF is harmful to overall human health and is associated with the development of chronic diseases.

Diets with higher amounts of UPF are linked with:

- Overweight and obesity
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Mental disorders

Almost **50%** of calories consumed daily by Canadians, including First Nations peoples, comes from UPF.



1 in 5 First Nations peoples reported having diabetes, compared to the national average of 1 in 10 people.

Levels of Food Processing

All foods and beverages are divided into four groups based on the level of food processing, called the NOVA Classification System.



Unprocessed or Minimally processed: Whole foods which did not undergo processing such as fruits, vegetables, grains, meats, eggs



Processed Ingredients: Minimally processed foods used to season, cook, and create meals like oil, sugar, honey, salt, butter



Processed foods: Minimally processed foods that use preservation or cooking methods including breads, cheese, canned fruits or vegetables



Ultra processed foods: Food products derived from foods or parts of foods like cookies, cakes, sugary drinks, fast-food

How do I recognize Ultra-Processed Food?

- Look at the new **Front of Package Nutrition Label** to see if the food is high in saturated fat, sugars and/or sodium.
- Look at the **Nutrition Facts Table** on a food package to see if % Daily Values for saturated fat, sugars and/or sodium are higher than 15%.
- Foods in restaurants will not have a Front of Package Nutrition Label or a Nutrition Facts Table. This label was created by ISC-AB.

Are all processed foods unhealthy?

Some processed foods are healthy because they provide a lot of nutrition without extra sugar, salt or other preservatives.

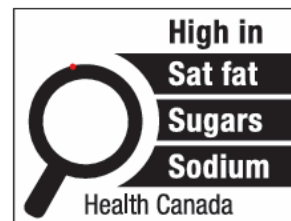
Examples of processed foods to include:

- Whole Grain Breads
- Yogurt, Cheese & Milk
- Canned items (Canned Fish, beans & vegetables)
- Frozen fruits and vegetables

Examples of Ultra Processed Foods to Limit:

- Sugary Breakfast cereals
- Sugar sweetened beverages
- Processed Meats
- Potato Chips
- Ready to Eat Meals
- Instant Noodles
- Frozen pizza
- Fast Food
- Ice Cream
- Candy
- Cookies & Baked Goods

UFP can be found in gas stations, fast food restaurants, community stores, schools, and workplaces.



Front of Package
Nutrition Label

Large Burger Meal

Nutrition Facts

Per 1 meal

Calories 1410		% Daily Value*
Fat 59 g		79%
Saturated 14 g		75%
+ Trans 1 g		
Carbohydrate 198 g		
Fibre 9 g		32%
Sugars 86 g		86%
Protein 30 g		
Cholesterol 70 mg		
Sodium 1400 mg		61%
Potassium 1250 mg		27%
Calcium 150 mg		12%
Iron 6 mg		33%
Vitamin C 0 mg		0%

*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot

Tips to reduce ultra processed foods in your diet:

- **Replace sugar sweetened beverages** with water and unsweetened beverages like coffee and tea.
- Choose **less processed foods**, such as:
 - Leftover meat instead of deli meats
 - rolled oats instead of sweetened instant oats
- Make **homemade versions** of your favorite ultra processed foods:
 - try a whole grain muffin recipe to replace store-bought muffins
- **Plan your meals and snacks** in advance to include more traditional foods:
 - vegetables and fruit like berries
 - whole grains like whole wheat bannock
 - protein foods like wild game & fish

Batal, M., Johnson-Down, L., Moubarac, J. C., Ing, A., Fediuk, K., Sadik, T., Chan, H. M., & Willows, N. (2018). *International journal of food sciences and nutrition*, 69(6), 753–761. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637486.2017.1412405>
 Batal, M., Johnson-Down, L., Moubarac, J. C., Ing, A., Fediuk, K., Sadik, T., Tikhonov, C., Chan, L., & Willows, N. (2018). *Public health nutrition*, 21(1), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017001677>