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Night Sweats and Delusions of Grandeur

DEMENTIA

Adverse Effects of Ultra-Processed Foods on Mental Health

Ultra-processed foods linked to higher depression, anxiety, and dementia risk.

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Reviewed by Devon Frye



KEY POINTS

- Consumption of ultra-processed foods has increased over the past 20 years across almost every segment of the U.S. population.
- Researchers have found that higher daily intake of ultra-processed foods was associated with a substantially higher risk of dementia.
- Researchers have also reported that those who consume higher amounts of ultra-processed food have more adverse mental health symptoms.

Consumption of ultra-processed foods has **increased over the past 20 years** across almost every segment of the U.S. population. **Ultra-processed foods** are largely devoid of



Source: Polina Tankilevitch/Pexels

whole foods, are industrially manufactured, are ready-to-eat or heat, and include additives. Examples include frozen pizza, fast food, canned soup, sweets, soda, salty snacks, and most breakfast cereals.

disease. A recent study has also reported that men who consumed high rates of ultra-processed foods were at **higher risk for developing colorectal cancer** than those who did not.

Now, research into ultra-processed food consumption has been extended to examine its impact on mental health.

Increased Risk of Dementia Associated with Eating More Ultra-Processed Foods

In a study **first published online at the end of July** in the journal *Neurology*, researchers found that a higher daily intake of ultra-processed foods was associated with a substantially higher risk of dementia. The researchers were also able to determine that substitution of some ultra-processed foods with unprocessed or minimally processed foods was associated with a substantially lower risk of dementia.

Over 72,000 participants were identified from the UK Biobank. Each participant was at least 55 years old and did not have dementia at the start of the study. Participants were followed for an average of 10 years, during which they filled out questionnaires regarding their diet. By the end of the study, 518 people were diagnosed with dementia.

After adjusting for other factors that could affect risk of dementia such as age, gender, family history, and heart disease, researchers found that every 10 percent increase in daily intake of ultra-processed foods was associated with a 25 percent higher risk of dementia. They also determined that substituting 10 percent of ultra-processed foods with unpro-

Ultra-Processed Food Consumption Associated with Adverse Mental Symptoms

In a study published on August 25 in *Public Health Nutrition*, **researchers report** that those who consume higher amounts of ultra-processed food have more adverse mental health symptoms.

“The ultra-processing of food depletes its nutritional value and also increases the number of calories, as ultra-processed foods tend to be high in added sugar, saturated fat, and salt, while low in protein, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals,” **said** Eric Hecht, M.D., Ph.D., corresponding author and associate professor in Florida Atlantic University’s Schmidt College of Medicine.

Researchers found that individuals who consumed the most ultra-processed foods had statistically significant increases in the adverse mental health symptoms of mild depression, “mentally unhealthy days,” and “anxious days.”

“More than 70 percent of packaged foods in the U.S. are classified as ultra-processed food and represent about 60 percent of all calories consumed by Americans,” **added** Hecht. “Given the magnitude of exposure to and effects of ultra-processed food consumption, our study has significant clinical and public health implications.”

THE BASICS

What Is Dementia?

References

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