

What are Ultra-Processed Foods (UPF)?

Chips, candy, soda, and fast food – these are some of the foods you might love, but they fall into a category called **ultra-processed foods (UPF)**. In the US, nearly 60% of adult diets and 70% of children's diets come from UPF, while most of the world still gets the majority of their calories from whole foods. Although UPFs may taste great, they often lack the nutrients our bodies need and can contribute to health problems over time.

THE NOVA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Not all processed foods are bad, but some are worse than others. Rather than determining how unhealthy a food is based on its nutrients alone, the NOVA Classification System sorts foods by how much they're altered from their natural state. It groups foods from the least to the most processed:

Group 1: Unprocessed or Minimally Processed Foods

Whole foods that are fresh, dried, frozen, or fermented with *no added chemicals*.



Group 2: Processed Culinary Ingredients

Extracted substances from whole foods like *oils, salt, and sugar* used in home cooking.

Group 3: Processed Foods

Whole foods (Group 1) combined with processed culinary ingredients (Group 2) like salt, sugar, or fats to enhance flavor or shelf life.



Group 4: Ultra-Processed Foods

UPFs are industrial products made mostly of *artificial ingredients, preservatives, and additives* you typically can't find in your kitchen.

WHY SHOULD YOU AVOID UPF?

Diets high in UPF are linked to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses. A 2019 study found that people eating a diet high in UPF consumed 500 more calories per day compared to those eating a whole foods diet, even when calories, sugar, and fat were the same in both diets. UPFs are designed to be addictive, making people overeat and crave more, leading to long-term health issues.

HOW CAN YOU AVOID UPF?

Choose whole, minimally processed foods (Group 1). As much as possible, cook meals at home instead of relying on packaged, ready-to-eat foods. You can also check out FoodFight USA's WTH Can I Eat Now? page (<https://foodfightusa.com/wth-can-i-eat-now/>) to learn how to cut down on UPF, find foods without the chemicals we hate, download food-scanning apps from Yuka, EWG, and GoCoCo, and read engaging content designed to educate and empower you.