

Ultra-Processing & What Comes Next: Reshaping Trust, Health, & the Future of Natural Food

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Ultra-Processing & What Comes Next: Reshaping Trust, Health, & the Future of Natural Food



Dr. Austin Perlmutter

Big Bold Health

UPF and Health





Food changes us across the lifespan

How much does food alter lifespan?

PLOS MEDICINE

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Estimating impact of food choices on life expectancy: A modeling study

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How much does food alter lifespan?

- Moving from a typical Western diet to an optimal diet at age 20 could increase lifespan by **10.7 years** for a woman in the US and **13 years** for a man.



What are we actually eating (and why)?

NCHS Data Brief ■ No. 536 ■ August 2025

Ultra-processed Food Consumption in Youth and Adults: United States, August 2021–August 2023

Anne M. Williams, Ph.D., M.P.H., Catharine A. Couch, Ph.D., R.D., Samuel D. Emmerich, D.V.M.,
and Damon F. Ogburn, Ph.D., M.S.P.H.

Ultra-processed Food Consumption in Youth and Adults: United States, August 2021–August 2023

Group	Total (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
All ages (Total)	55.0	54.7	55.3
Ages 1–18 years	61.9	61.9	61.8
Ages 19 and older	53.0	52.7	53.3

- 1-18 year olds get 62% of calories from UPF
- 19 and older get 53%
- Top 4 sources: sandwiches, sweet baked goods, savory snacks, sweetened beverages
- A decrease over the last 10 years

The “Food” ecosystem is different now

- 74% of foods in the US food supply are sweetened¹
- Average American eats 34 tsp sugar a day (500 extra calories)- [USDA](#)
- Average American spends 39 min on food prep/cleanup (down from hours decades ago) – [US Bureau of Labor](#)
- Americans consume 23% more calories a day than in 1970 –[Pew Research](#)
 - Most comes from flours, grains, fats and oils

1. Popkin, B. M., & Hawkes, C. (2016). Sweetening of the global diet, particularly beverages: patterns, trends, and policy responses. *The lancet Diabetes & endocrinology*, 4(2), 174-186.



TASTY BURGERS!



Chips & Candy!

Soda Time!

Ice Cold!

Hot, Fresh PIZZA!

\$1.99

Sweet Treats!

NOW: FRIES & SODA COMBO!



Why does it matter?

JAMA

Original Investigation

FREE

Association Between Dietary Factors and Mortality From Heart Disease, Stroke, and Type 2 Diabetes in the United States

► J Prev Alzheimers Dis. 2025 Jan 1;12(2):100042. doi: [10.1016/j.tjpad.2024.100042](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tjpad.2024.100042)

Ultra-processed food consumption and risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease: The Framingham Heart Study

[Galit Weinstein](#)^{a,*}, [Daniel Kojis](#)^{b,c}, [Ayantika Banerjee](#)^c, [Sudha Seshadri](#)^{c,d,e}, [Maura Walker](#)^{f,g,†}, [Alexa S Beiser](#)^{b,c,d,†}

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PMCID: PMC12184002 PMID: [39863327](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39863327/)

Research Letter | Psychiatry



Consumption of Ultraprocessed Food and Risk of Depression

Chatpol Samuthpongton, MD¹; Long H. Nguyen, MD, MS^{1,2}; Olivia I. Okereke, MD, SM^{3,4,5}; et al

► [Author Affiliations](#) | [Article Information](#)

► Adv Nutr. 2023 Dec 18;15(1):100121. doi: [10.1016/j.advnut.2023.09.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.advnut.2023.09.009)

Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Cohort Studies

[Marilena Vitale](#)^{1,*}, [Giuseppina Costabile](#)¹, [Roberta Testa](#)¹, [Giovanna D'Abbronzio](#)¹, [Immacolata Cristina Nettore](#)², [Paolo Emidio Macchia](#)², [Rosalba Giacco](#)^{1,3}

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PMCID: PMC10831891 PMID: [38245358](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38245358/)

UPF intake is a principal and modifiable health variable

- About 1 in 2 deaths in the US from cardiometabolic causes are related to diet¹
- People under 68 eating the most UPF were at a 2.7x higher rate for Alzheimer's with a 13% increase for every daily serving of UPF²
- Highest UPF consumers shown to have up to 49% higher chances of depression³
- Higher UPF correlated with type 2 diabetes, hypertension, lipid issues, obesity⁴





We have normalized
ultra-processed “food”

Lets go global

THE LANCET

SERIES | GLOBAL HEALTH

Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health

- “...global proliferation of UPFs has become one of the most urgent yet inadequately addressed threats to human health in the 21st century.”

Matji, J. N., & Brero, M. (2025). Protecting children from ultra-processed foods. *The Lancet*, 406(10520), 2610-2612.

Ultra-Processing & What Comes Next: Expectations of the Conscious Consumer



Jessica Wright
SPINS



Expectations of the Conscious Consumer

EXPO WEST 2026



How shoppers define "healthy"

Shoppers definition includes nutrient rich foods and not added sugars but production methodologies important to younger generation

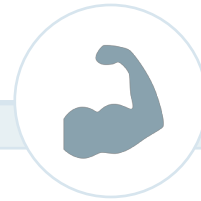
UNIT
GROWTH



More Fruits & Veggies

72% shoppers

Vegetables **+2%**
Fruits **+4%**



Protein & No Added Sugar

57% Protein
53% No Added Sugar

20g+ Protein **+4%**
No Added Sugar **+11%**



Organic & Sustainable

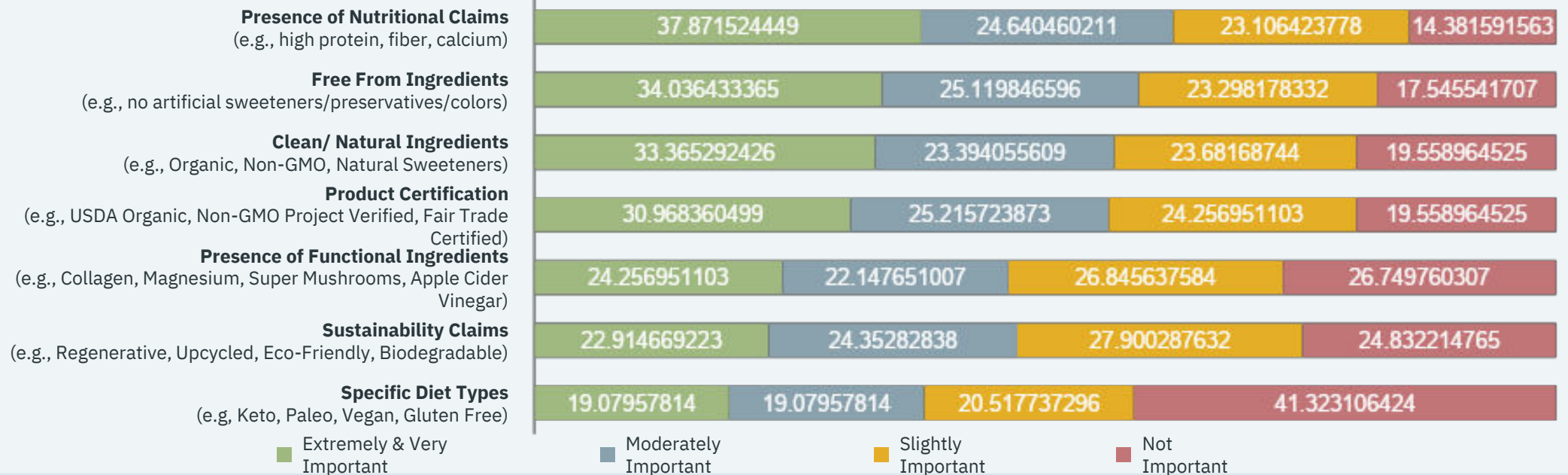
36% total
43-50% GenZ and Millennial

Organic **+4%**
Regenerative Organic **+17%**



Nutritional Claims and Ingredients are top of mind for the Conscious Consumer

“For each of the product and packaging characteristics, please rate the level of importance to you when shopping for groceries.”





What products do you purchase when trying to add...

MORE PROTEIN

Top Survey Responses & Unit Trends:

52%	Eggs ↓
34%	Meat/seafood meal component ↑
26%	Meat that requires cooking ↑

MORE FIBER

Top Survey Responses & Unit Trends:

44%	Fresh veg ↑
41%	Fresh fruit ↑
26%	Beans ↑

LESS SUGAR

Top Survey Responses & Unit Trends:

69%	Fresh fruit ↑
41%	Yogurt with no added sugar ↑
33%	Cereal with no added sugar ↑



Beyond taste and price, ingredients continue to be an important factor when choosing a new or premium brand



Top 5 Purchase Drivers When Buying A New Brand



Top 5 Characteristics Willing To Pay Premium For



Source: Value Conscious Consumer Survey, N = 1,042, "Thinking about the last time you purchased a new brand (one you purchased for the first time) at the grocery store or a retailer where you purchase food and beverages, what was the primary reason for purchasing this new brand?" "Which of the following would you be willing to pay a premium for?"



The Role of Natural Products in Growth & Innovation

The gap between premium demand and new product innovation creates opportunity in the market

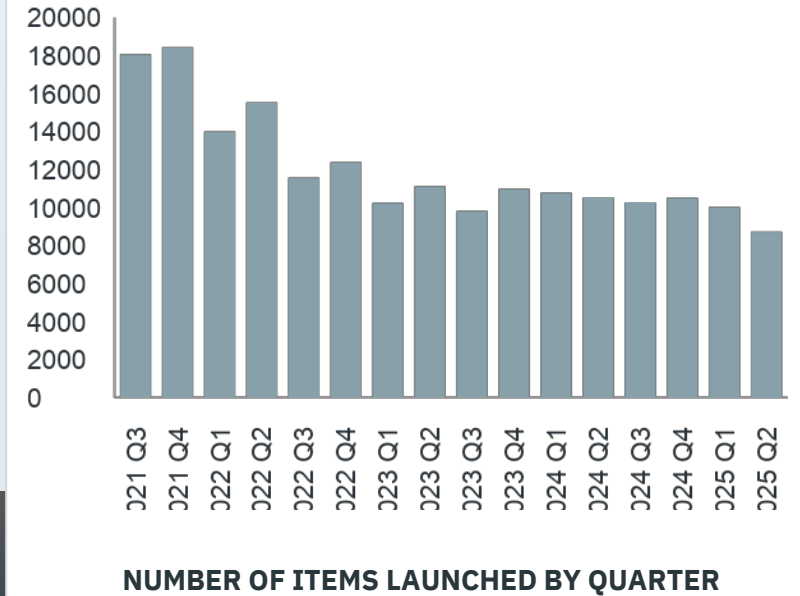
Premium products lead CPG growth

Avg. Retail Price	Unit Growth Vs. YAGO	Dollar Growth Vs. YAGO	Positioning Group
\$3.76	-0.2%	+2.7%	Total Food
\$4.72	+5.7%	+9.4%	NATURAL PRODUCTS
\$3.98	+3.3%	+6.1%	SPECIALTY & WELLNESS PRODUCTS
\$3.59	-1.6%	+0.9%	CONVENTIONAL PRODUCTS

Product without Ultra Processed Ingredients increase that market edge

Avg. Retail Price	Unit Growth Vs. YAGO	Dollar Growth Vs. YAGO	Positioning Group
\$4.47	-0.1%	+3.0%	Total Food
\$5.10	+5.6%	+9.8%	NATURAL PRODUCTS
\$4.82	+1.1%	+4.0%	SPECIALTY & WELLNESS PRODUCTS
\$4.07	-2.9%	-2.9%	CONVENTIONAL PRODUCTS

New product innovation has slowed

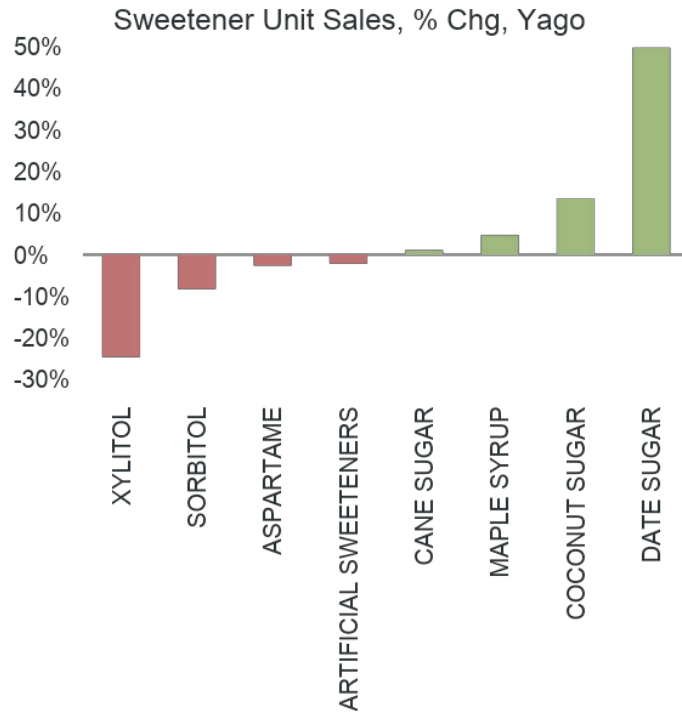


Source: total Food & Beverage includes Grocery, Refrigerated, & Frozen Departments; Natural Expanded, Mulo + Convenience (powered by Circana) ; 52 Weeks Ending 11/30/2025



Less is More

Sweeteners



Whole Foods

Products containing whole food ingredients growing across Food & Beverage

\$ % Change

Whole Pumpkin

+12%



Whole Kale

+9%



Whole Sweet Potato

+6%



Artificial Ingredients

Behind protein and sugar, no artificial ingredients is the third most sought after claim by shoppers³

\$ % Change

-4%

Artificial Colors

-3%

Artificial Preservatives

-2%

Artificial Flavors

Products With No Artificial Ingredients, By Category
Units % Chg, Vital Clean²

SS Rice Cakes	+23%
FZ Breakfast Foods	+17%
SS Jerky & Meats	+16%
RF & PB Yogurt	+10%
Creams Creamers	+7%



Thank You!

CONTACT US AT
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Ultra-Processing & What Comes Next: Reshaping Trust, Health, & the Future of Natural Food



Megan Westgate

Non-GMO Project

Food Integrity Collective

Ultraprocessing Is Not a Synonym for Packaged Food

- Some processing makes food safer, more accessible, and more practical.

It's also not a synonym for Junk Food

- Some industrial processing separates and recombines ingredients in ways that change the food's original structure and how it functions in the body.

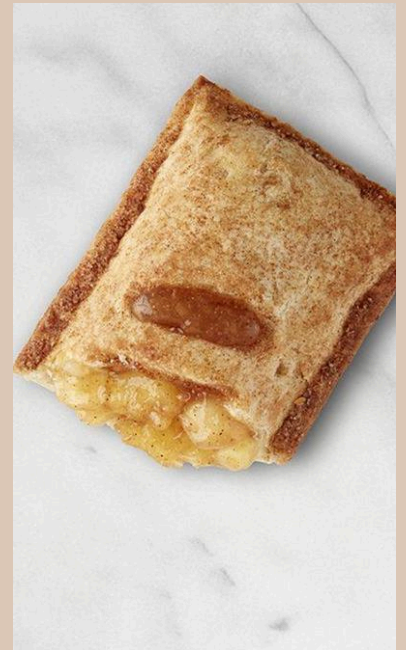
The Non-UPF Verified Standard defines the line between the two.





Processing Exists on a Spectrum

Not all processing is equal. The Non-UPF Verified Standard differentiates intensity and defines thresholds.





Processing Limits

- Processing Classification
 - ◆ Prohibited
 - ◆ Conditional
 - ◆ Permissible
- Quantitative Guardrails
 - ◆ $\geq 70\%$ minimally or moderately processed ingredients
 - ◆ $\leq 30\%$ conditionally processed ingredients
 - ◆ No prohibited methods at any stage





Ingredient Integrity & Formulation Requirements

Harmonized Prohibited Ingredients List (Annex B)
(EU regs, retail standards, U.S. state legislation)

Added Sugar Caps by Category
(2%–40%, calculated using FDA definition)

All Non-Nutritive & Biotransformed Sweeteners Prohibited
(including erythritol, monk fruit extract isolates, steviol glycosides)

Conditional Limits on Gums, Highly Refined Oils & Sodium Additives





Added Refined Sugar Limits (Excerpt)

Confectionery: 40%

Desserts: 20%

Breakfast Foods: 15%

Beverages: 5%

Prepared Meals: 3%

See Table 6-1 in the Non-UPF Verified Standard for more categories and details



Defining the next era of processed food



- We don't have to choose between convenience and integrity.
- We can differentiate helpful processing from structural degradation.
- We can translate concern into measurable criteria.
- And we can build trust by aligning innovation with nourishment.



Ultra-Processing & What Comes Next: Reshaping Trust, Health, & the Future of Natural Food



Paul Schiefer
Amy's Kitchen

Amy's Principles are Real



**Great Quality,
Organic Ingredients**



**Traditional Cooking,
at Scale**

- We spend more on ingredients that are grown in organic soil and harvested at peak freshness.
- We train, recruit, and develop people who cook food instead of automating the process.
- Our large-scale kitchens have a different layout with 3-5x more space dedicated to cooking than average manufacturing facilities.
- We choose higher quality ingredients and cooking methods to make food authentically that delivers homemade taste.

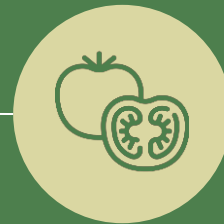
Others Built Shortcuts, We Built A Kitchen

Our Kitchens



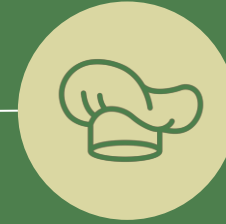
Values Driven, Not Profit Driven

We answer to our conscience, not shareholders.



Organically Grown, Not Factory Farmed

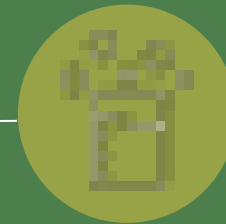
Real flavor starts with real ingredients grown on real farms by real people.



Real Cooks, Not Chemists

Quality is born from traditional cooking at scale, not in food labs.

Their Plants



We Don't Concoct Food. We Cook It.

No powders, no synthetic flavors. All organic ingredients grown in the ground; never sourced from a lab.

Typical Mac & Cheese



Amy's Mac & Cheese

