



SOCIETY OF  
BEHAVIORAL  
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## Ultra-Processed Foods

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) represents 2,400+ scientific researchers, clinicians, industry professionals, educators, and students who work collectively to treat and prevent disease through research and interventions that improve the health of individuals, families, and whole communities. Our members focus on behavior change across the lifespan and work in more than 40 specialty areas, including nutrition, cancer, chronic disease, obesity, and physical activity.

### What is Ultra-Processed Food?

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are foods low in nutrient density, and their consumption is significantly associated with diet-related chronic conditions. UPFs can be defined as foods with formulations of ingredients made through a series of industrial processes that require sophisticated equipment designed to create convenient (i.e., ready-to-consume), highly profitable (i.e., inexpensive, non-perishable, highly marketable), and hyper-palatable products positioned to compete with fresh foods. Common UPFs include sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB), such as soda and fruit drinks, packaged snacks, ready-to-heat food products, and reconstituted meat products, such as hot dogs. Over-reliance on processed foods, especially energy-dense foods high in added sugars, saturated fats, and salt, displaces home-prepared meals as well as fresh fruit and vegetables that are known to be more nutrient-dense.

### Health Risks of Ultra-Processed Foods and Implications for U.S. Dietary Policy

While all foods are processed to some degree, UPFs contain ingredients harmful to human health over time. Evidence suggests that processing techniques and ingredients used in processed foods, such as partially hydrogenated oils, cosmetic additives (i.e., flavors, colors, and emulsifiers), and excessive added sugars or salt, negatively affect health. Growing scientific evidence on the effects of UPF consumption on public health can serve as a basis for dietary guidelines and public policies.

The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) does not include direct recommendations on UPFs, due to inconsistent definitions and study methods in the current evidence base, as noted by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. While there was limited evidence to develop recommendations on limiting UPFs in the DGAs, recommendations from the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) suggest that healthy dietary patterns should largely include whole, minimally processed foods.

### Recommendations:

1. In future iterations of DGAs, recommendations should include specific guidance on limiting UPFs based on consensus built by the next scientific advisory committee.
2. In addition, future DGAs should explicitly state which recommendations promote healthy dietary patterns and would constitute whole, minimally processed foods.
3. Federal policymakers should restore transparency in the translation of the scientific report from the DGAs scientific advisory committee into public dietary guidance issued by federal agencies.