

[IMAGE]

A Dangerous Downward Trend

By Editorial Staff

Children's eating habits have always been a big topic; after all, we all want our kids to get off to a healthy start and cultivate habits that will benefit them for a lifetime. Unfortunately, kids are bombarded with messaging all day that teaches them to crave the exact opposite: fast food, candy and other sweets, processed foods all tailored to the young, easily swayed audience. And it's only getting worse. Here's why.

"Ultraprocessed" foods are defined by Harvard Health as foods that "likely have many added ingredients such as sugar, salt, fat, and artificial colors or preservatives. Ultra-processed foods are made mostly from substances extracted from foods, such as fats, starches, added sugars, and hydrogenated fats. They may also contain additives like artificial colors and flavors or stabilizers. Examples of these foods are frozen meals, soft drinks, hot dogs and cold cuts, fast food, packaged cookies, cakes, and salty snacks."

Sound all too familiar? According to new research, these types of foods are disturbingly familiar to children and young adults (ages 2-19). In fact, according to national nutrition data gathered from 1999-2018, "the estimated proportion of energy intake from consumption of ultraprocessed foods has increased among youths in the US and has consistently comprised the majority of their total energy intake." Findings appear in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

With the obesity rate among children also on the rise, it's not difficult to make the connection. That makes your job as a parent that much more challenging – and more important. Step one: Teach your children about the dangers of ultraprocessed foods and why minimally processed alternatives are desirable (per Harvard Health, "whole foods in which the vitamins and nutrients are still intact. The food is in its natural (or nearly natural) state. These foods may be minimally altered by removal of inedible parts, drying, crushing, roasting, boiling, freezing, or pasteurization, to make them suitable to store and safe to consume.

Unprocessed or minimally processed foods would include carrots, apples, raw chicken, melon, and raw, unsalted nuts.") Step two: Make sure you're showing your kids the right way to eat; after all, you're their first and biggest hero. Be the hero of their healthy eating habits.

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