

Ultra-processed food linked to risk of early death

Rosie Taylor

A daily diet of a packet soup for lunch, a ready meal for dinner and a couple of snacks in between could be enough to raise your risk of early death by up to 62 per cent, scientists have warned.

Two studies have found links between the consumption of "ultra-processed" food and an increased risk of heart disease, stroke and death.

Researchers said the results showed that governments needed to promote fresh or lightly-processed foods, although they admitted that more studies were needed to prove that processed

foods affected health. Ultra-processed foods include packaged baked goods and snacks, fizzy drinks, sugary cereals, ready meals, packet vegetable soups and reconstituted animal products such as chicken nuggets and fish fingers. They are often high in sugar, fat, oils and additives, with a lack of vitamins and fibre.

Previous studies have suggested a link between ultra-processed foods and higher risks of obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and some cancers.

The latest studies, among the largest to date, followed 125,058 French and Spanish adults for up to ten years. The

Spanish research, led by the University of Navarra, monitored how much ultra-processed food 19,899 people ate.

In the following decade, 335 participants died. Those who ate four or more portions of ultra-processed food per day were 62 per cent more likely to die than those who ate less than two servings, once scientists adjusted for factors such as age, gender, physical activity levels and smoking.

Each extra portion of ultra-processed food brought an 18 per cent increased risk of death.

The French study asked 105,159 adults to keep diaries of their diets and

monitored their health over an average of 5.2 years. A research team led by the Sorbonne university, in Paris, found that every 10 per cent rise in the amount of ultra-processed food in a diet was associated with a 12 to 13 per cent rise in heart disease and an 11 per cent increase in a condition that can cause strokes.

The studies, published in the *BMJ* journal, used the same system for classifying processed foods.

Victoria Taylor, of the British Heart Foundation, said: "Observational studies like these can only show an association. They cannot tell us what is behind this."

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