

# Fact bite #23



## Ultra-processed foods (UPFs)

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**UPFs are industrially formulated products that undergo extensive processing and often contain synthetic additives, such as flavor enhancers, preservatives, and colorings, with little to no whole food content.**

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**Due to numerous processing steps and packaging materials, UPFs can have a higher synthetic chemical burden compared to minimally processed foods, leading to increased exposure to harmful substances.**

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**Substances from food contact materials (FCMs) such as plastic packaging and processing equipment can migrate into food during production, storage, and preparation, increasing the chemical load in UPFs.**

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**Plastics are widely used throughout the food system, including in cultivation, transportation, packaging, and processing of UPFs. This contributes to microplastic contamination and synthetic chemical exposure.**

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**Chemical migration from FCMs into food is influenced by factors such as storage time, temperature, food type (e.g., fatty or acidic), and packaging size. UPFs commonly involve conditions that increase migration.**

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**Studies have linked exposure to certain food contact chemicals, such as phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA), to adverse health outcomes including cancer, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.**

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**Due to the socioeconomic disparities in access to healthier foods and the widespread health risks linked to UPFs, researchers have called for regulations to reduce chemical exposures from food packaging and processing.**

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