

Ultra-processed foods are harmful to brazilians: Driven by industrial modalities and changes in the pattern of the family diet, these products are increasingly consumed

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the objective is to promote reflection on the relationship between eating habits and processed foods. Based on reading scientific articles and other publications on the subject, we sought to carry out qualitative research in order to list factors considered harmful to health. Therefore, the aim is to bring to light pertinent information about the harmful influence of food on collective health, to understand the process of identifying components present in ultra-processed foods, thus highlighting the harm of excessive intake. The growth in the participation of these foods in the Brazilian diet was accompanied by the expansion of large transnational companies that produce them without due concern for collective health. Between the 2002–2003 POF and the 2017–18 POF, some groups were reported to be growing significantly. Cold and processed foods, along with cakes, pies, breads and sweets in general, practically doubled the amount of calories consumed per person compared to the poorest 20%.

Keywords: Ultra-processed foods, Individual and collective health, Transnational companies.

INTRODUCTION

The unconscious consumption of ultra-processed foods has never been more expressive than it is today. Over the years, we stopped consuming the traditional rice and beans and started to consume more cookies, packaged snacks, candies, lollipops, ice cream, soft drinks. The use of these foods has increased considerably because they are cheap, practical and available in any environment – at the informal vendors' stalls at the doors of schools, airports, subways, pharmacies, bus stations, gondolas at the entrance door of large and small supermarket chains.

The growth in the share of these foods in the diet of Brazilians has been accompanied by the expansion of large transnational companies that produce them without due concern for public health, namely: Unilever, Nestlé, Mondeléz, Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Danone and company - lately, work has been done to find out how these companies established themselves in Brazil and what part of the food market they dominate.

These practical and very tasty foods were developed and directed as a consumption option due to the dynamics of the daily life of the workers, because to the extent that the labor market began to demand greater presence and dedication in relation to the dynamics of the diversity of the field of activities, there

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was less time to prepare one's own diet. Thus, people eat more out of the home due to changes in environments conducive to eating.

This is shown in *Figure 1* – related to the IBGE's 2018 Household Budget Survey (POF) – which shows that the caloric availability from ultra-processed food products in the Brazilian diet has increased considerably among men and women.

Figura 1: POF – IBGE/2018

PESQUISA DE ORÇAMENTOS FAMILIARES: POF 2017 - 2018 			
<i>Participação do consumo fora (%)</i>			
Alimentos e Preparações	Consumo fora do domicílio (% em relação ao total consumido)		
	Total	Homem	Mulher
Cerveja	51,0	52,8	45,5
Bebidas destiladas	44,1	45,1	41,0
Salgados fritos e assados	40,1	43,9	36,4
Sorvete/picolé	37,2	37,4	36,9
Salgadinhos chips	32,7	28,3	35,6
Bolos recheados	32,6	31,7	33,1
Refrigerantes	31,1	31,3	30,7
Preparações mistas	27,2	27,4	27,0
Chocolates	25,8	24,4	26,6
Pizzas	24,7	28,6	19,4
Farofa	20,6	21,4	19,6

DEVELOPMENT

EASE OF ACCESS TO ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

According to Claro, a professor in the Department of Nutrition at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), who studies the relationship between income, prices and food, he notes that eating ultra-processed foods was a symbol of status and wealth in the 1980s. The implementation of the Real Plan began to stabilize the Brazilian economy in the early 1990s, increasing the population's income. The price of ultra-processed foods began to rise as consumers made more money, according to the researcher quoted above:

At the same time that the consumption of fresh food has decreased, the consumption of these products has increased. The richest are still the biggest consumers of ultra-processed foods, according to IBGE data. The top 20% have 24.7% of the caloric availability of these products. The percentage is halved among the poorest, to 12.5 percent.



Between the 2002–2003 POF and the 2017–18 POF, some groups were reported to be growing significantly. Cold and processed foods, along with cakes, pies, breads and pastries in general, nearly doubled the amount of calories consumed per person compared to the poorest 20 percent. The most recent data from the IBGE show that there are still some clear differences: between the poor and the rich, between the urban and rural populations, and between the population of the South-Southeast and the North-Northeast.

The most recent data from the IBGE show that there are still some evident differences: between the poor and the rich, between people living in cities and rural areas, and between people living in the south and northeast. The former are beginning to have the greatest availability of ultra-processed foods, while the latter are progressing; It can be understood that this change can lead the eating habits of Brazilians to a consumption pattern directed preferentially to the consumption of industrialized products.

POSSIBLE LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Ultra-processed foods go through several industrial processes and stand out for having characteristics that can be harmful to the human body, such as low fiber and excess sodium, fats and sugars. When tasted in excess, these foods can be responsible for favoring the development of serious health problems, such as: obesity, diabetes, hypertension, dementia and cancer. As an example of ultra-processed foods, we can point out: stuffed cookies, soft drinks, frozen pizzas, ready-made sauces and instant noodles, sausages in general.

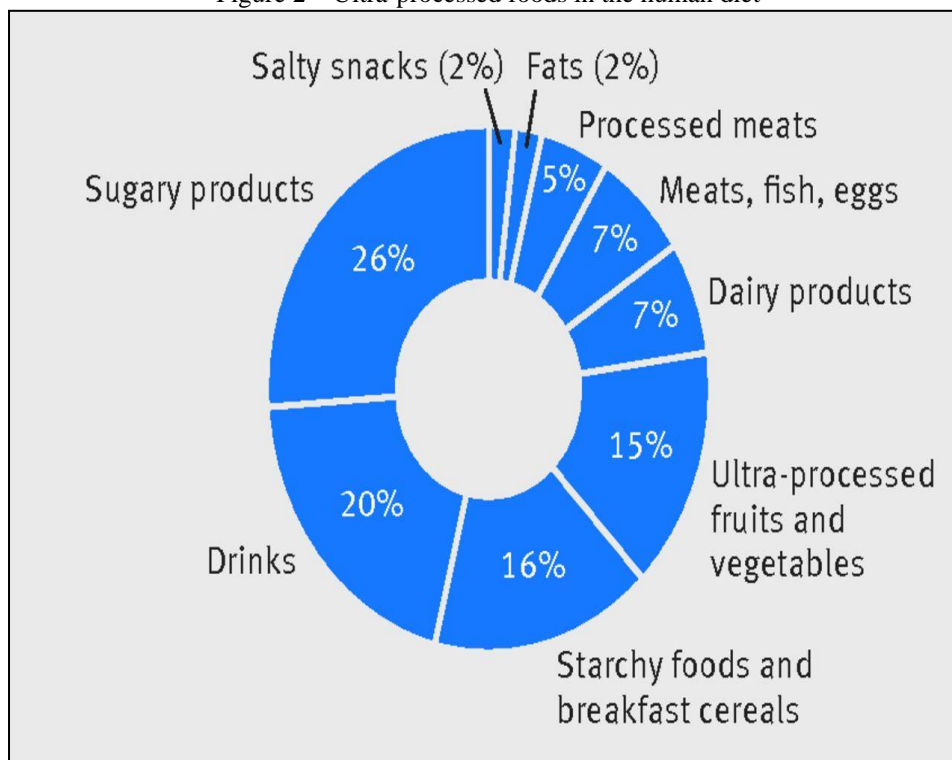
The development of various types of cancer is related to ultra-processed foods. Recent studies show that excessive food consumption significantly increases the likelihood of developing both general and specific cancers.

The study titled Ultra-processed food consumption, cancer risk and cancer mortality: a large-scale prospective analysis within the UK Biobank, published on January 31, 2023, examined the existing associations between ultra-processed food consumption and cancer risk and associated mortality for 34 specific cancer types.

After analyzing the results, the authors concluded that the increased consumption of ultra-processed foods may indeed be related to a higher burden and mortality of general and specific cancers in specific locations. In addition, they pointed out that the correlations were even more consistent with regard to overall cancer and ovarian cancer outcomes in women.

As can be seen in *Figure 2* below, the relative contribution of each food group to the consumption of ultra-processed foods in the human diet has increased significantly:

Figure 2 – Ultra-processed foods in the human diet



CONCLUSION

Diabetes mellitus, hypertension and obesity. The constant intake of processed foods can have several consequences. Healthy eating has improved people's quality of life, but both the population and the State of Brazil ignore the subject. Thus, political and social change is needed at the national level.

The busy daily lives of Brazilians tend to consume processed foods, as they are simple to prepare and save time. Thus, Hippocrates' maxim, "Let your medicine be your food, and let your medicine be your medicine," demonstrates humanity's need to consume foods that provide essential nutritional values to the body in order to promote a person's health and well-being.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that a diet with processed foods favors the attainment of chronic diseases, such as hypertension and obesity. In this regard, data from the Ministry of Health point to a 60% increase in the number of Brazilians with obesity, since a poor diet contributes to the development of the situation. Therefore, it is evident that Brazil needs government measures to change the situation.

Thus, it is highlighted that actions are necessary to change the current scenario. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the school and the family, should promote discussions on the subject, so that students understand the importance of healthy eating and practice good eating habits.

Thus, the Ministry of Health should strengthen public policies in favor of good dietary practices, through lectures and exams in health units that care for the population, relying on multidisciplinary care for such action.



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