

NEWS BREAK

Article: **How strong is the evidence on ultraprocessed food and chronic disease?**

Section: **The MIX, E10**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, March 23, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

****Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.***

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

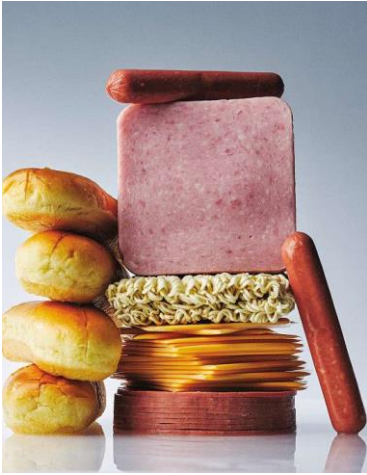
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will explore recent research on ultraprocessed foods and how they can impact our health. Students will ponder their own food choices and think about what food companies (and our government) should do to protect consumer's health. They will also discuss public health policies regarding socioeconomic factors, health outcomes and diet-related chronic diseases in our country.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

One 2024 review of studies looking at associations between ultraprocessed foods and **cardiometabolic** risk concluded the quality of the evidence was “not satisfying,” noting that the degree of risk changed by as much as 50% depending on how ultraprocessed food intake was measured.

Cardiometabolic Guess:

Cardiometabolic Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Given the prevailing sense of certainty that ultraprocessed foods are a prime culprit in chronic disease, what may surprise you?
2. Almost all the evidence comes from observational studies, which can only find associations between two things — they can’t establish _____ and _____.
3. Even worse, many of those studies don’t control for variables, such as _____, that could offer an alternate explanation for any observed associations between ultraprocessed foods and poor health.

4. Also, these observed associations might be statistically significant, but they are rarely strong enough to be what?
5. Recent analyses of data from the Nurses' Health Study and Health Professional Follow-Up Study found that higher ultraprocessed food intake was associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes risk in U.S. adults. However, intake of certain ultraprocessed foods was associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes-what specific foods were listed in the article?
6. What about randomized controlled trials, which can show cause and effect? Well, there's been a grand total of two. Both were very small, very short and only looked at weight gain. So, if ultraprocessed foods do harm health, how does that happen? Unfortunately, there are many theories, but no meaningful research. What are 5 specific questions the article included that would be important for researchers to learn more about?
7. What foods would be included in the Western-style diet?
8. Did a 2023 review of proposed mechanisms explaining associations between ultraprocessed foods and weight gain show evidence of direct links?
9. What is the food matrix?
10. The authors of a 2024 review argue that the food industry should develop what?

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

How much control do you have over what you eat? Are you more influenced by your friends, your family, or commercials?

Do you eat a lot of processed foods at home? With your friends?

Do you think about the foods and drinks that you consume? The ways in which you are fueling your body? Why or why not?

Why is it important to eat "whole" foods, like fruits and vegetables? How are they different from processed foods?

The text raises questions about whether ultraprocessed foods are "hyperpalatable" or "addictive." If certain foods are designed to be highly appealing and potentially addictive, what are the ethical implications for the food industry and the role of government regulation in protecting consumers?

The text points out that many studies don't control for variables like poverty. How might socioeconomic factors influence dietary choices and

health outcomes? What are the implications of this for public health policy aimed at addressing diet-related chronic diseases?

Understanding How We Learn About Food and Health:

- What's the difference between just noticing something (like, "People who eat lots of chips seem to get sick more often") and doing a careful experiment? Why does it matter how scientists study food?
- The article talks about "statistically significant" but "not clinically significant." Imagine you found that kids who like a certain candy are slightly taller, but not by much. Does that mean the candy makes you grow? Why or why not?

Thinking About Our Food Choices and Why They Matter:

- Why might poor people have a harder time eating healthy food? How does this affect their health?
- Even though both cheese puffs and a frozen veggie meal are "processed," why might one be healthier than the other? How can we tell the difference between "good" processed food and "bad" processed food?
- Sometimes, people don't have time to cook. How can "easy" foods help? What are some "easy" foods that are also healthy?

The Role of Companies and Our Choices:

- Should food companies make healthier versions of processed foods? Why or why not? What could make them want to do this?
- Some foods are designed to be super tasty and make you want to eat a lot. Is that fair? Should there be rules about how food is made?

Food, Health, and Our Community:

- If making processed food healthier costs more, who should pay for that? Should it be the food companies, the government, or the people buying the food?
- Why are some processed foods easy to eat too much of? How can we learn to eat the right amount of food?

News Break is posted to the Web on Tuesday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please [register online](#) or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.

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