

Almost half of Canadians' daily calories come from ultra-processed foods

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Just under half (46%) of total daily energy consumed by Canadians in 2015 came from ultra-processed foods, and children and youth were the highest consumers. These findings are from a new study released today in *Health Reports* that also makes comparisons to Canadians' diet in 2004, when ultra-processed foods accounted for 48% of total energy intake. This study used the internationally-recognized NOVA classification system, which classifies food and drink products such as soft drinks, instant noodles, packaged cookies and snacks, and fast-food and frozen meals as ultra-processed.

Nearly all foods undergo some type of processing (e.g., peeling, grinding, canning, freezing, pasteurization). Ultra-processed foods, as defined by the NOVA classification system, are a distinct group. These foods are mainly formulations of industrial ingredients, plus additives, and contain little whole foods, if any. There is growing evidence that a greater share of ultra-processed foods in the diet is linked with poor overall diet quality, weight gain, and increased risk of developing a number of chronic conditions.

The slight decline in Canadians' intake of ultra-processed foods since 2004 was largely because of lower intake of soft drinks and fruit juices and fruit drinks. Children over age five and adolescents remained the highest consumers of ultra-processed foods in both years, on average consuming more than 50% of total energy from these foods. The study also found that older adults over age 54 were the only age group to consume proportionally more energy from ultra-processed foods in 2015 than in 2004.

While this analysis is limited to a breakdown by age and sex over time, a follow-up study is planned to look at difference in intake of ultra-processed foods by socio-demographic characteristics.

Note to readers

Data are from the 2004 and 2015 Canadian Community Health Surveys – Nutrition. The target population was Canadian household residents aged 2 years or older, living in the 10 provinces.

Ultra-processed foods were defined according to the NOVA classification system, which classifies foods and drinks according to the extent and purpose of industrial food processing. Foods and drinks are classified as unprocessed or minimally processed, processed culinary ingredients, processed, or ultra-processed. Consumption of ultra-processed foods was measured as the percentage of total daily energy.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5049.

The article "[Consumption of ultra-processed foods in Canada](#)" is now available in the November 2020 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 31, no. 11 ([82-003-X](#)).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article "[Smoking patterns based on birth-cohort-specific histories from 1965 to 2013, with projections to 2041.](#)"

To enquire about "Consumption of ultra-processed foods in Canada," contact Didier Garriguet (didier.garriguet@canada.ca), Health Analysis Division.

To enquire about "Smoking patterns based on birth-cohort-specific histories from 1965 to 2013, with projections to 2041," contact Douglas G. Manuel (dmanuel@ohri.ca), Ottawa Hospital Research Institute.



For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).