

Increasing the amount of ultra-processed foods that you eat also shortens your life, according to a new study. The research, published in JAMA Internal Medicine, tracked nearly 45,000 French men and women over eight years. It found that for every 10 percent increase in the amount of ultra-processed foods the participants ate, risk of death went up 1 percent.

Ultra-processed foods fall at the far end of the NOVA food classification system, which breaks what you eat down into four categories: unprocessed foods (edible parts of plants and animals); processed ingredients (like oils, flour, or sugar); processed foods (which involve cooking unprocessed foods with processed ingredients to make breads or canned vegetables); and ultra-processed foods (which don't have any intact, unprocessed parts).

These ultra-processed foods are mostly made from substances derived from other foods, preservatives, and additives—designed to create convenient and long-lasting products. Both processed and ultra-processed foods can add excess sugars, oils, and fats to a diet, notes Claire Berryman, an assistant professor in the department of nutrition, food, and exercise sciences at Florida State University. Ultra-processed foods, though, take the amount to the next level—and also contain additives and other highly manufactured ingredients.

The JAMA Internal Medicine can't say that these foods caused an earlier death, just that they're associated with an early death. It's not possible, therefore, to say what exactly in these foods contributes to the problems. However, the high amounts of bad-for-you ingredients are likely to play a role, Berryman says. "Anytime you're getting an excess of sugar, fat, or salt, there can be problems." Here's what's hiding in the packaging: