



Consumption of ultra-processed foods when very young may increase obesity risk

Ultra-processed food consumption among preschool Canadian children is alarmingly high, CHILd research has found. It also found this to be associated with greater risk of living with obesity or overweight, especially among boys.

Published in *JAMA Network Open*, the findings could inform public health initiatives aimed at preventing obesity and associated health problems.

OBESITY RISK STARTS EARLY

“It is known that the increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods—convenient, ready-to-eat foods with a long shelf-life and low nutritional value, usually high in sugar, saturated fats and salt (like instant noodles and chips, soda, flavoured yogurts)—is causing a public health crisis worldwide,” comments lead author **Zheng Hao Chen**, a graduate student in nutritional sciences at the Miliku lab at the University of Toronto.

“And it has already been shown that adults who consume these foods are at higher risk of living with obesity. However, our study is important for suggesting that this risk may begin early, among preschool kids, and especially among males.”

The researchers looked at the early-life dietary habits of from 2217 participants in CHILd, based on questionnaires completed by their caregivers when the children were three years old. They compared this information with physical measurements taken of the same kids at age five, including their height, weight, waist size, and skinfold thickness.

TOO MUCH JUNK FOOD

The researchers found that, at age three, on average these children were getting nearly half of their daily energy intake from ultra-processed foods. They also found that by age five, kids who consumed these foods had higher body fat measurements and an almost 20% increased risk of living with overweight or obesity. These associations were particularly high among boys whose diets included ultra-processed foods

“These findings truly warrant public health attention.” adds lead author Dr. **Kozeta Miliku**, CHILd’s Clinical Science Officer and an Assistant Professor in Nutritional Sciences at the University of Toronto .

“To provide kids with a healthier future, Canada must promote healthier food choices in early childhood.”



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