

The Rise and Risks of

ULTRA-PROCESSED PRODUCTS

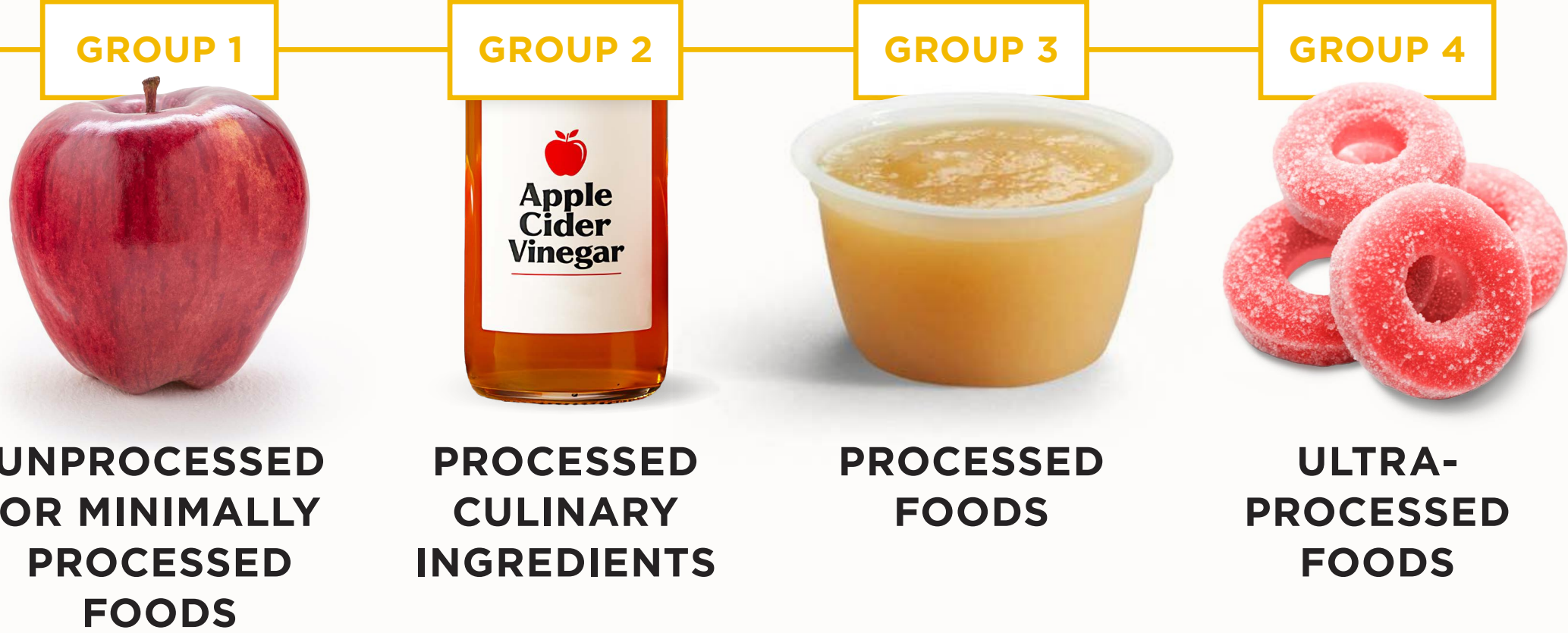
What are Ultra-Processed Products?

Ultra-processed products (UPPs) are created by heavily altering whole foods in factories, stripping them of their original form and rebuilding them with ingredients and additives like sweeteners, flavorings and colorants that aren't possible to make at home—often resulting in products with high levels of sugar, unhealthy fats and sodium.



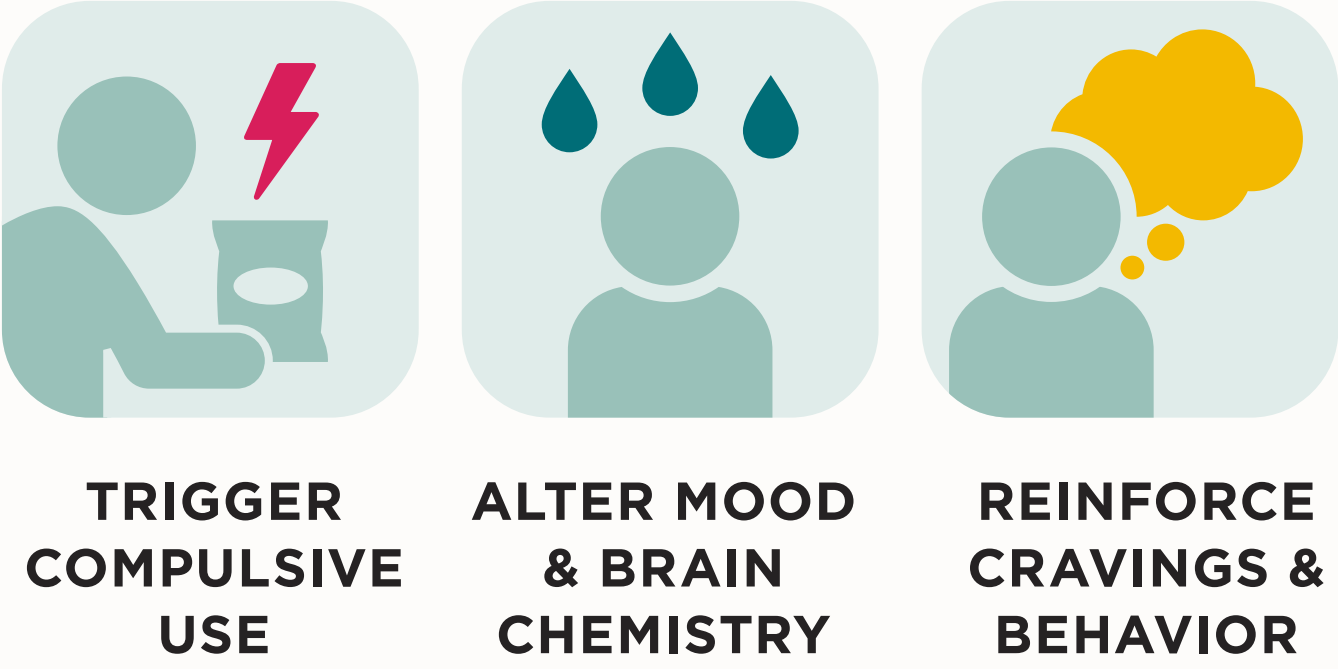
NOVA FOOD GROUPS

The NOVA classification system is a framework that groups foods based on the extent and purpose of food processing applied to them.



UPPs are Designed to be Addictive

These foods can spark dopamine surges in the brain—just like nicotine and alcohol. UPPs meet the same criteria used to classify tobacco as addictive:



USING THE TOBACCO PLAYBOOK

- Some of the same tobacco companies that enhanced cigarettes' addictiveness applied the tobacco playbook to make UPPs irresistible.
- UPP addiction is just as prevalent as addiction to substances like nicotine and alcohol.
- Emerging evidence indicates that individuals may develop a tolerance to UPPs, and discontinuation could trigger withdrawal symptoms.
- The addictive factors of UPPs reinforce addiction behaviors, creating a cycle that is hard to break.

Addictive Factors

COMPULSIVE USE
driven by the need for pleasure, leading to loss of control over intake and a growing need for more to feel satisfied, despite negative consequences

REINFORCED CRAVINGS
triggered by rapid digestion and activation of the brain's reward system

ALTERED BRAIN CHEMISTRY
creates a sense of pleasure and reinforces behavior, while reducing activity in areas linked to self-control and dulling the brain's response to unprocessed and minimally processed foods

ADDITIVES
to activate the brain's reward system through enhanced flavor, texture, smells and appearance

AGGRESSIVE MARKETING
targeting children and marginalized communities

WIDELY AVAILABLE
and ready-to-eat formats encourage frequent consumption

ENGINEERED
not to fill us up, driving overconsumption even when our bodies have had enough

Addiction Behaviors

UPPs Reach Far Beyond the Plate

CULTURAL IMPACTS

UPPs ERODE TRADITION

UPPs can erode shared traditions related to food culture and community, leading local cultures to become more like a dominant global one.

The world is moving away from traditional diets toward UPP-heavy diets, driven by the global expansion of UPP companies and the increasing availability of UPPs across food markets worldwide. This shift is particularly noticeable in regions such as Asia, the Middle East and Africa, where traditional diets have long been the norm.

FOODS THAT ARE:	ARE ESSENTIAL FOR:
NUTRITIOUS	HEALTHY PEOPLE
CULTURALLY-RELEVANT	STRONG COMMUNITIES
SUSTAINABLY-PRODUCED	RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

HEALTH IMPACTS

UPPs HARM HEALTH

Diets high in UPPs are associated with a higher risk for noncommunicable diseases and even pre-mature death.

- Cancer
- Mental health (anxiety, depression, adverse sleep)
- Respiratory problems (wheezing)
- Cardiovascular disease
- Gastrointestinal issues (Crohn's disease)
- Metabolic health (diabetes, obesity, overweight, hypertension)
- Dental caries (tooth decay or cavities)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

UPPs STRAIN THE PLANET

Their production consumes vast finite resources and drives environmental degradation through intensive production methods and overconsumption.



UNEQUAL EFFECTS OF UPP CONSUMPTION

- YOUTH** face higher levels of UPP addiction than adults.
- PEOPLE FACING FOOD INSECURITY** are more reliant on UPPs on a daily basis and more likely to be addicted to UPPs.
- PEOPLE WITH OBESITY** show higher UPP addiction rates.



Global Health Advocacy Incubator