

Teens ate less ultra-processed food consumption during pandemic, reversing trend of three decades

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For the first time in the last 30 years, the consumption of ultra-processed foods among teenagers in the United States declined during the

COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study presented at ENDO 2022, the Endocrine Society's annual meeting in Atlanta, Ga.

The decline in junk food consumption among teens took place in the wake of several unprecedented changes brought by the pandemic, including the closure of schools, social restrictions and the shift to working from home, according to lead researcher Maria Balhara of Broward College in Davie, Fl.

"We found that teenagers' consumption of these foods has decreased significantly during COVID-19," she said. "Further, the decrease has been sustainable and continued its [downward trend](#) even after easing pandemic restrictions."

Energy drinks, [potato chips](#), sugary sodas and candy are considered ultra-processed and are widely linked to rising obesity and expanding waistlines, Balhara noted. Previous research has found that ultra-processed [food intake](#) now comprises 67% of the adolescent diet.

The new findings come from 452 participants ages 13 to 19 in the Processed Intake Evaluation (PIE) study. The study found that after the COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, participants' average ultra-processed food consumption score dropped by nearly 6%, and it continued to decline as the COVID-19 restrictions later eased. It is now almost 14% below the level it was before the pandemic began.

The PIE study will ultimately enroll 1,800 participants, and the researchers will evaluate ultra-processed [food consumption](#) in this larger group.

"The early findings of this study provide an encouraging signal and a window of opportunity for strengthening nutritional and behavioral programs aimed at curbing the obesity epidemic," Balhara said.

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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