

Is there a connection between eating ‘highly processed foods’ and poor mental health?

There is little reason to wonder why so many didn’t trust government approval of the COVID-19 vaccine; the public hadn’t trusted government science decision-making for decades prior to that, vaccine deniers had simply switched from Democrats to Republicans.

The reason distrust is so endemic is because of epidemiological hype and media outlets treating it like it is science, rather than noting that correlation is placed over in the EXPLORATORY pile and maybe interesting enough for science to prove.

Science 2.0 has long ridiculed alternating Miracle Vegetable and Scary Modern Life claims trotted out by Harvard School of Public Health or the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. They have found so many spurious links to longevity *and* cancer that it is a miracle we don’t all live forever thanks to the Mediterranean Diet or keel over tomorrow due to trace chemicals.

All of those claims have been perpetuated by corporate media, who then wave criticism away by claiming they just write ‘the news’, without acknowledging they hire reporters to match their bias and editors to greenlight what counts as news. If you believe in acupuncture and psychics, 80 percent of the time I know how you vote. So does the *New York Times*, which is why they have endorsed both while claiming it’s in a journal and therefore news.

One recent effort getting new life thanks to [a sympathetic ally in corporate journalism](#) is a “link” between ultra-processed foods and mental health – written by an epidemiologist who doesn’t even work at the university on his bio, he volunteers so he can use the name. Like all epidemiology it is nothing except looking at statistics with columns of food and rows of diseases and finding something with enough check boxes they can declare statistical significance.

It is easy to do. So easy it is a surprise that journalists still write about it uncritically. That feeds into belief an ideological fix is in.

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It is easy to get statistical significance using food frequency questionnaires

The problem is that these correlation papers rely on asking people what they ate in the causal data. Sometimes they are even worse by asking people what they 'feel', so a medical diagnosis isn't needed in the effects data. It can create anything. Discredited organic industry economist Chuck Benbrook got a lot of corporate media attention with [a paper claiming organic milk was healthier](#) – because organic drinkers reported on a survey they liked the 'mouth feel' of organic milk more than the normal milk that the scholars told them was next to it.

That is how poorly defined "ultraprocessed" food can be linked to anything. Years ago, organic industry activists tried to get [Democrats in Congress](#) and [allied blue state legislatures to put warning labels on some foods that had been genetically engineered](#). It was quickly noted that all foods have been genetically engineered. Then they tried to get warning labels on processed food and, you guessed it, it was quickly noted that all food has been processed.

Inference by helping verb – 'might' and 'could' make any epidemiology claim sound better than it is

So they promoted a new term that would exempt food that was made in a 16th century mill, like flour; that term was "ultra-processed food." It has no scientific or legal definition, it would only be products containing things like high-fructose corn syrup or non-organic-industry preservatives. Which means they can scare people by claiming 70% of food in a grocery store will lead to dementia.

It was maddening by definition, and even more crazy because journalists immediately bought into it. Velveeta, for example, was created to put a cheese flavor around the sodium citrate chemical that keeps cheese in cheese dishes from separating into oil and clumps. Yet Velveeta is an ultra-processed food while sodium citrate, which is bitter, mixed in with even more cheese and butter to hide its taste, is health food – despite having far more calories.

It's difficult to get angry at the *New York Times*. Their audience wants to read this stuff, their editors were hired to provide content that gets people looking at ads which appeal to that audience, and journalists were recruited because they are willing to write it and feel like they are objective. It is a free market, they are satisfying a demand.

But it isn't science.

It is instead a veneer of science using sentence structure. To try and legitimize it, they mix their food frequency questionnaire belief in with settled science, like that too many calories makes you fat and that obesity is the number risk factor for type 2 diabetes. You aren't born that way, as type 1 diabetics are. It is preventable in nearly all cases, just like gout is often preventable with lifestyle changes.

Then they scare people by noting this food is everywhere and linking that to depression. Are you depressed, including a self-diagnosis? Do you eat more? The food made you depressed! 10,000 people on a survey result shows it. Critics, like experts in statistics, are dismissed with "Do you even science, bro?" hand-waving, but experts are correct. Using the methodology common in these claims, virtually

anything can be correlated to depression. Or cognitive decline, which is so multifactorial you could use organic pesticides to suggest a causal link.

Then the journalist throws in claims about the gut microbiome. Why not epigenetics too? The article even includes reliable 'everything is killing us except the corporations who pay True Health Initiative' [epidemiologist Frank Hu](#). He doesn't even need to say anything different than he claims about meat, he just swaps in sugar and, like his methodology, his claims remain the same.

This newest populist claim is that you shouldn't eat it if you can't pronounce it. Basically, the *New York Times* can just repeat whatever they read on the Food Babe website.

It's fine for their base, they have overlap of nearly 100 percent, but don't let them call it science journalism.

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