Study: What does ‘ultra-processed’ food do to our brains and capacity to learn?

Ultra-processed foods may not only affect our bodies, but our brains too.

New research suggests links between ultra-processed foods—such as chips, many cereals and most packaged snacks at the grocery store—and changes in the way we learn, remember and feel. These foods can act like addictive substances, researchers say, and some scientists are proposing a new mental-health condition called “ultra-processed food use disorder.” Diets filled with such foods may raise the risk of mental health and sleep problems.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

SIGN UP

In a recent study published in the journal Cell Metabolism, researchers primed participants with two different kinds of snacks and saw how their brains later responded to a cue for a high-fat, high-sugar food, which many ultra-processed foods are.

Scans of their brains showed that the participants who ate a high-fat, high-sugar snack for eight weeks had much higher activity in parts of the brain that create dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in motivation, learning and expecting and experiencing rewards, when they saw a cue telling them to expect another high-sugar, high-fat food.

…

In a different study, four days of having a breakfast high in saturated fat and added sugar was linked to reductions in performance on some learning and memory tests, according to researchers in Australia. People who had a healthier breakfast didn’t have the performance changes.

This is an excerpt. Read the original post here