



Concerns Over Consuming Ultra-Processed Food

For Prelims: Ultra-Processed Food, Food Processing Industry, [Covid-19 Pandemic](#), [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#), [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#).

For Mains: Concerns Over Consuming Ultra-Processed Food.

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, a report released by [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and the **Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations** found that India's **Ultra-Processed Food Sector** grew at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13.37 % in retail sales value from 2011 to 2021.

What is Ultra Processed Food?

▪ About:

- Processed food usually has **salt, sugar and fat added** to it. Food is considered ultra-processed if **five or more ingredients have been added** to the original product.
- These other ingredients are usually **flavour and taste enhancers, emulsifiers and colours**, and all of them are meant to **improve shelf life and taste** or make the food convenient to eat.
 - For instance, **atta in raw form is unprocessed**. Dalia, with salt and sugar added, is processed food. If we make **cookies out of atta** and add a lot of other things, **it is ultra-processed**.

▪ Concerns:

- Salt, sugar and fat are commonly added to **all processed food**. Such foods are not healthy to consume regularly or in large quantities.
- They can cause **obesity, hypertension, cardiac issues** and lifestyle diseases. The artificial chemicals added to ultra-processed food have **a negative impact on gut health**.
- Any imbalance in gut health can lead to a host of problems, from neurological **issues and stress to mood swings and obesity**.
- Most ultra-processed foods use taste enhancers, so people automatically get addicted to them.
 - On top of that, the natural food is broken down to such an extent that it gets absorbed very quickly by the body.
- The effect of high doses of simple sugar is that the body releases insulin, which makes you **feel hungry and want to eat more food**. That is why we say sugar is addictive.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

▪ Temporary Disruption and Rebounded:

- The [Covid-19 Pandemic](#) caused a temporary disruption, causing the annual growth rate

of the Indian ultra-processed food sector to plummet from 12.65% in 2019 to 5.50% in 2020.

- However, the sector rebounded remarkably, with an 11.29% growth recorded in 2020-2021.

▪ **Dominant Categories and Sales Volume:**

- The most popular ultra-processed food categories include **chocolate and sugar confectionery**, salty snacks, beverages, ready-made and convenient foods, and breakfast cereals.
 - In terms of retail sales volume from 2011 to 2021, **beverages held the highest share**, followed by chocolate and sugar confectionery and ready-made and convenience foods.

▪ **Health Consciousness and Changing Consumption Patterns:**

- Health-conscious consumers shifted away from carbonated sugar-sweetened beverages to **fruit and vegetable juices** during the pandemic, potentially due to their perceived immune-boosting properties.
 - However, these alternative beverages may also contain high levels of free sugars.

What are the Recommendations?

▪ **Stricter Advertising and Marketing Regulations:**

- The report underscores the **necessity for stricter advertising and marketing regulations**, particularly concerning products like sweet biscuits that are popular among children.
 - The high salt content in salty snacks poses risks to consumers' health, making it crucial to address through regulations.

▪ **Clear Definition of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) Foods:**

- The [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) should collaborate with stakeholders to establish a clear definition of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) foods.
- Linking the **tax structure with the definition of HFSS foods** through the GST Council can **incentivize healthier and reformulated options by imposing higher taxes** on products exceeding recommended levels of fat, sugar, and salt.

▪ **Comprehensive National Nutrition Policy:**

- There is a need for a **robust national nutrition policy** addressing both under- and over-nutrition, with well-defined objectives and targets, after thorough consultations with stakeholders.
 - Existing policies like [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#) lack comprehensive coverage of overnutrition and diet-related diseases.

▪ **Nutritional Transition and Long-Term Goals:**

- The report calls for a shift towards a healthier lifestyle, emphasizing the importance of reducing the consumption of ultra-processed foods and increasing the intake of whole grains.
- Low intake of whole grains has been identified as a **primary dietary risk factor for noncommunicable diseases in India**.

What are the Government Initiatives to Promote Healthy Lifestyle?

- [The National Food Security Act \(NFSA\), 2013.](#)
- [PM-POSHAN Scheme.](#)
- [Fit India Movement](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With what purpose is the Government of India promoting the concept of “Mega Food

Parks”? (2011)

1. To provide good infrastructure facilities for the food processing industry.
2. To increase the processing of perishable items and reduce wastage.
3. To provide emerging and eco friendly food processing technologies to entrepreneurs.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

- The Scheme of “Mega Food Park” aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers, so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastage, increasing farmers’ income and creating employment opportunities, particularly in the rural sector. **Hence, 2 is correct.**
- It envisages creation of state-of-the-art support infrastructure in a well-defined agri/horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units in the industrial plots provided in the park with well-established supply chain. **Hence, 1 is correct.**
- “Mega Food Park” scheme has no provision for providing eco-friendly food processing technologies to entrepreneurs. **Hence, 3 is not correct. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Q. Aspartame is an artificial sweetener sold in the market. It consists of amino acids and provides calories like other amino acids. Yet, it is used as a low-calorie sweetening agent in food items. What is the basis of this use? (2011)

- (a) Aspartame is as sweet as table sugar, but unlike table sugar, it is not readily oxidized in human body due to lack of requisite enzymes
- (b) When aspartame is used in food processing, the sweet taste remains, but it becomes resistant to oxidation
- (c) Aspartame is as sweet as sugar, but after ingestion into the body, it is converted into metabolites that yield no calories
- (d) Aspartame is several times sweeter than table sugar, hence food items made with small quantities of aspartame yield fewer calories on oxidation

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Discuss the factors for localisation of agro-based food processing industries of North-West India. (2019)

Q. What are the challenges and opportunities of the food processing sector in the country? How can the income of the farmers be substantially increased by encouraging food processing? (2020)