

Here's the Truth About:

Ultra-Processed Food



WHAT ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD ACTUALLY TAKES AWAY

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OVERVIEW

Today's media is talking a lot about what's been added to our food, and you'll hear it from me.

☹️ **Pesticides.**

☹️ **Preservatives.**

☹️ **PFAS.**

☹️ **Forever chemicals.**

All of that matters enormously.

But there's something else happening to our food supply that doesn't get nearly enough attention...and once you see it, you can't unsee it.

The food industry didn't just strip nutrients out of our food...


In many cases, it stripped out the very structure that allows your body to recognize it as food in the first place.



In this month's newsletter, we're going to talk about what that means, why it matters for your family's health, and — as always — what you can do about it starting today.

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD DIDN'T JUST REMOVE NUTRIENTS

Here's a question worth considering:



What if the biggest danger in modern food isn't what's been added — but what's been destroyed?

We've all heard the warnings about ultra-processed foods.

- Too much sugar.
- Too much salt.
- Too many additives with names we can't pronounce.

And yes — *those matter.*

But a landmark three-part series published in The Lancet in December 2025 revealed something even deeper.

Ultra-processing doesn't just remove nutrients. ***It destroys the food matrix.***

The food matrix is the natural structure of food — the intact plant cells, fibers, and architecture that determine:

- how quickly food is digested
- how nutrients are absorbed
- how your blood sugar responds
- and whether your brain ever receives the signal that you're full

In simple terms, the food matrix is what allows your body to recognize something as nourishment — rather than being overwhelmed by a rapid flood of sugar and starch it was never designed to handle.



THE KEY INSIGHT

Researchers at the Quadram Institute found that when the natural cellular structure of fruits, vegetables, and grains is destroyed through industrial processing, digestion speeds up dramatically.

That faster digestion leads to:

- rapid blood sugar spikes
- bypassed fullness signals
- and gut bacteria that never get the fiber they depend on

In other words, the body loses the natural systems that regulate food.

Let me put this into perspective.

Ultra-processed foods now make up nearly **60% of the average adult diet** in the United States, and about **70% of children's diets**. That means most Americans — and most American children — are getting the majority of their calories from food whose natural structure has been industrially dismantled.

And the consequences go far beyond weight gain.

A major study recently found that people who consume the most ultra-processed foods face a 47% higher risk of heart attack and stroke compared to those who consume the least.

And of more than 100 long-term studies, 92 of them linked ultra-processed food consumption to at least one chronic disease. Researchers identified **strong connections with 12 separate health conditions**, including:

- obesity
- type 2 diabetes
- cardiovascular disease
- depression
- and premature death

Twelve.

From food that has been so fundamentally altered it barely resembles the original ingredients it came from.

INSIGHTS CONTINUED

One of the Lancet researchers, Marion Nestle of NYU, put it bluntly:

“Most ultra-processed foods bear little resemblance to the real foods they were derived from. The extraction process makes ingredients more rapidly digestible and calories more quickly absorbed — and that is not to the benefit of human metabolism.”

Think about that for a moment.

The food industry took something your body evolved over millennia to process — whole, structured food — and **turned it into something your metabolism struggles to regulate.**

Not by accident.

But by design.

Why?

Because food that bypasses your fullness signals is food you're likely to eat more of.



YOUR GUT UNDER SIEGE

If the food matrix story is concerning, the downstream effects are even more important.

Because the damage from ultra-processed foods doesn't stop with digestion...**It reaches your gut.**

And when your gut is compromised, *every other system in your body feels it.*

A comprehensive review published in *Nutrients* (2025) found that ultra-processed foods — with their synthetic additives, emulsifiers, and lack of fiber — are systematically reducing microbial diversity in the human gut, while increasing inflammatory microorganisms and contributing to chronic, systemic inflammation.

Researchers observed reduced populations of beneficial bacteria including:



Akkermansia muciniphila



Lactobacillus reuteri

And these bacteria aren't passive residents.

- They play active roles in your health.
- They produce short-chain fatty acids that maintain the intestinal barrier.
- They synthesize vitamins.
- They regulate immune responses.
- They even produce up to 90% of your body's serotonin, the neurotransmitter that influences mood, sleep, and emotional regulation.

When ultra-processed foods disrupt these microbial communities, the effects go far beyond digestion.

THE SCIENCE

This is no longer just a conversation about diet.

It's about protecting your family's brains, your children's developing immune systems, and long-term quality of life.

A review in *Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology* (2024) found growing evidence linking diets high in ultra-processed foods to:

- inflammatory bowel disease
- colorectal cancer
- irritable bowel syndrome

Researchers also found that food additives — particularly emulsifiers commonly used in packaged breads, ice creams, and sauces — can directly alter gut microbiota and trigger intestinal inflammation.

Even more concerning, research now connects ultra-processed diets with cognitive decline and dementia.

One prospective cohort study found that every 10% increase in ultra-processed food intake raised dementia risk by 25%. Replacing that same 10% with minimally processed food reduced risk by about 20%.

The message from the research is becoming clear: **Ultra-processing isn't an inconvenience. It's an assault on the biological systems that keep us healthy.**

THE RECLAIM PROTOCOL

I know today's edition is a lot to absorb.

But the goal here is never just to present problems.

It's to give you tools you can actually use. Because information without action just creates anxiety — and that's not what this community is about.

The science is clear: Your body doesn't just need the right nutrients...

...It needs food with its natural structure intact (think whole foods) — food your digestive system and microbiome can actually work with.

Here's a simple place to start.

5 Steps to Rebuild What Ultra-Processing Has Taken



1. Eat food with structure

Choose whole apples instead of apple juice.
Steel-cut oats instead of instant oats.
Whole grains instead of refined flour.



If a food requires almost no chewing, your body's natural digestive signals are being bypassed.

Intact plant cells slow digestion, stabilize blood sugar, and feed beneficial gut bacteria.

5 STEPS TO REBUILD WHAT ULTRA-PROCESSING HAS TAKEN



2. Feed your microbiome daily

Fermented foods like whole fat yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and miso contain beneficial microbes that help restore microbial diversity.

Make one fermented food a daily habit...

Your gut bacteria will thank you.



3. Rebuild with essential amino acids

Ultra-processing often degrades protein quality.

Supporting your body with complete essential amino acids from high quality protein can help repair tissues and support metabolism — particularly if you're recovering from years of highly processed food.

Amino acid

5 STEPS TO REBUILD WHAT ULTRA-PROCESSING HAS TAKEN



4. Apply the 5-ingredient rule

Before anything goes into your grocery cart, **turn the package over.**

If the ingredient list contains more than five items — or includes words you don't understand or can't pronounce (emulsifiers, stabilizers, maltodextrin, high-fructose corn syrup) — put it back.

This one habit alone can eliminate a huge percentage of ultra-processed foods.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size oz.	
Serving Per Container	
Amount Per Serving:	
Calories	Calories From Fat
% Daily value*	
Total Fat	%
Saturated Fat	%
Trans Fat	%
Cholesterol	%
Sodium	%
Total Carbohydrate	%
Dietary Fiber	%
Sugars	%
Protein	

*Percent Daily values are based on a 2000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.



5. Cook more — even imperfectly

A simple homemade meal made from whole ingredients is almost always nutritionally superior to a packaged product that looks “healthy.”

Cooking isn't just a lifestyle choice anymore.

In many ways, it has become an act of health protection for your family.



THE BIG PICTURE

Some governments are beginning to respond.

Brazil's national school feeding program has committed to ensuring 90% of school meals are fresh or minimally processed by 2026, a policy highlighted by the Lancet series as a global model.

Meanwhile, California became the first U.S. state to legally define ultra-processed foods in October 2025.

Change is coming...but slowly.

But your family doesn't need to wait for legislation to start protecting itself.

Health Hack of the Day

Chew longer.

Seriously.

Ultra-processed foods require significantly less chewing than whole foods, which bypasses the oral-brain signals that regulate appetite and digestion. A Japanese crossover study found that ultra-processed diets contribute to weight gain partly because people chew less often.

Aim for 20–30 chews per bite of whole food.

It **slows digestion, improves nutrient absorption, and helps your brain recognize fullness sooner.**

Simple.

Free.

And you can start at your very next meal.



I'M HERE TO HELP

Meet Brenda

At the end of the day, this is why I focus so much on simple, real food. Not perfection. Not complicated rules. Just meals that still look like food, taste like food, and support your body the way it was designed to be supported.

When we move back toward whole, structured foods — the kind you can recognize, cook, and share — something remarkable happens. Digestion calms down, energy steadies, and eating starts to feel normal again. And honestly, that's the goal: food that nourishes you without making life harder.

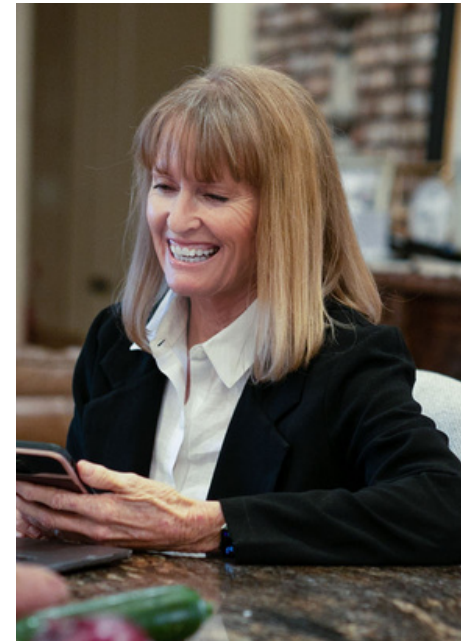


For many women, going gluten-free feels like the hardest first step — especially when label-reading is confusing, meals feel unfamiliar, and you're not sure what to eat instead.

That's exactly why I created the *Lazy Girl Comfort Food Course*. Binge it in a weekend, and you'll have everything you need to start eating healthier right away — with simple swaps, familiar comfort foods, and zero overwhelm.

👉 **Get the Course Here:**

<https://www.highwindshealth.com/offer-455019-872791-1912>



If you're trying to simplify gluten-free and bring real comfort food back to your table, this is exactly what we focus on inside the Gluten Free Made Easy Community. Come join us.

The *Course* gives you the tools — the *Community* helps you use them without slipping back into confusion.

👉 **Join Here:**

<https://community.highwindshealth.com/community>