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Dispelling the Myth of Ultra Processed Foods

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The concept of ultra processed foods calls for serious misinterpretations of the role of food processing in human health. Numerous articles and scientific publications report food processing as a factor leading to adverse dietary outcomes and public health problems. The serious simplification of food classification at a binary level in published studies to foods and ultra processed foods is purporting the misinformation of food processing as the danger to public health and even as a cause of mortality. Obviously, such relationships are overstated and must be corrected. Firstly, it must be recognised that food processing is very different in its meaning from processed food. Secondly, when the extent of processing is reported as a health contributing factor or included in nutritional guidance, the levels of food processing, separate from food formulation, must be shown on an ordinal scale. Thirdly, unprocessed foods are an exception rather than the norm and as such they may be a risky alternative to common diets. Fourthly, the modern food systems and societies may not be able to function without access to processed foods. Furthermore, using processing as a nutritional parameter requires means to measure exposures to processing from foods, meals and diets before processing vs. health relationships are established. Food processing needs may also be described by legislation to ensure food safety besides rigid, scientific data -based regulations controlling ingredients and additives use in food formulations. A robust food classification system that recognises processing and formulation as individual contributors to food properties is required to show whether food processing *per se* or chosen food formulation ingredients of processed foods cause adverse health outcomes. Besides well-defined processing terminology being essential, no food classification or nutritional guidance should compromise the robust scientific risk assessment and regulatory frameworks governing food processing and formulation or the overall food safety and quality.