

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

February 18, 2018

## “Healthy Balanced Diets May Be Hard To Find”

We are repeatedly told to eat a healthy balanced diet but who determines what is included in that diet? Opinions vary considerably, and it is difficult to find conclusive scientific verification of the ideal healthy balanced diet. A new study shows that a diet that includes a lot of highly processed foods loaded with sugar, fat, and salt may do more than raise the risk for overweight, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. French investigators have found that highly processed foods such as packaged baked goods, instant soups, reconstituted meats, frozen meals, and shelf-stable snacks also contain substances that may significantly increase overall risk for cancer and breast cancer. But, a British expert said, “People shouldn't worry about eating a bit of processed food here and there based on this study.” We are admonished to avoid “processed foods” that include mass-produced packaged breads and buns, sweet or savory packaged snacks, packaged confectionery and desserts, sodas, and sweetened drinks, meatballs, poultry and fish nuggets, and other reconstituted meat products using non-salt preservatives such as nitrites. Instant noodles and soups, frozen or shelf-stable prepared meals, and food products containing mostly sugar, oils, and fats or hydrogenated oils, modified starches, and protein isolates. Ultra-processed foods such as dehydrated soups, processed meats, biscuits, and sauces have a high salt content, the researchers note. Foods preserved with salt are associated with an increased risk for gastric cancer. However, many of these results were produced by observational studies, which can not prove anything and can only make associations. Practical dietary advice is hard to come by. The problem is that the definition of “processed and ultra-processed foods” they have used is so broad and poorly defined that it is impossible to decide exactly what, if any, causal connections to various diseases have real significance. The UK newspaper the *Guardian* reports the following comment from a spokesman for the Food and Drink Federation: “Processed food should not be demonized — by working closely with our partners throughout the food supply chain, we can use processing positively to ensure all sectors of society have access to safe, affordable food.” It is becoming more difficult to find a truly healthy balanced diet without limiting your food choices and raising the cost of your overall food bill. Avoid empty calories, when possible.

In the America that I love, be sure to get a healthy balance of nutrients and calories. Read food labels carefully, even though companies may try to hide the true composition of their product. Huge quantities of everyday processed food have excessive levels of sugar, fat, and salt stuffed in them. Always avoid extreme or fad diets, emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables in moderate portions and exercise regularly.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

[rhowesmd@hughes.net](mailto:rhowesmd@hughes.net) | [www.iwillfindthecure.org](http://www.iwillfindthecure.org)

