



WEST VIRGINIA ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

NEWSLETTER & MEMBER UPDATES

REGISTER NOW!!!

2026 WVAND CONFERENCE

When: Friday, April 17th, 2026

Where: Tamarack Conference Center in Beckley, WV. Registration: will open in early 2026.



Registration is now open for the 2026 WVAND Annual Conference and Expo. The conference will be on April 17th at the Tamarack Conference Center in Beckley, WV. Please see our website for all the details and registration links!

WVBOLD UPDATES

The West Virginia Board of Licensed Dietitians (WVBOLD) is asking for nominations for the Lay Person position. Nominations will be sent to the Governor's Office by WVAND and are contingent upon his approval.

Qualifications and responsibilities:

All members of the WVBOLD must be a US citizen and a West Virginia resident. The lay person member cannot be a registered or licensed dietitian and must not be subject to the practice regulations of the Board. The Board would prefer a nominee that is familiar with financial spreadsheets. Special preference will be given to a person with an accounting background but a CPA is not required.

Please send nominations to Linda St. Clair at lsstclai@gmail.com or 304-444-7642.

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS: BEYOND THE HEADLINES

By McKenna Killion, BS, Dietetic Intern

In a world where news travels fast through social media and other outlets, it's easy to see headlines that can surprise you and even make you anxious. This is especially true regarding news on nutrition, which is always changing and evolving with new research and studies. Like many things you may see on social media, some of this information could potentially be misinterpreted or dramatized in order to gain more attention. For example, you may see an article about how eating a certain food is "guaranteed" to lead to adverse health conditions such as cancer or cardiovascular disease. It's easy to take such information at face value especially when it sounds this serious, but it's also important to look beyond the headlines and get the full picture before you become panicked about your nutrition. In this case, we'll discuss ultra-processed foods, which have been a big topic recently regarding nutritional health.

WHAT ARE ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS?

Ultra-processed foods may be a term you've heard come up recently, whether it be from social media or even your favorite news outlet. Recently, ultra-processed foods have gained attention due to their emphasized negative health impacts, specifically being linked to colorectal cancer. It is worth asking however, what is considered an "ultra-processed" food? A lot of the foods we eat have been processed to some capacity, but some are more processed than others, and therefore less fresh and natural. Foods or meals are considered ultra-processed if they are manufactured in mass quantities with added processed ingredients or preservatives, such as nitrates, nitrites, salt or high amounts of sugar. Common examples of ultra-processed foods can include deli meats, frozen meals, fast food items, snack foods or sugary beverages like soda.



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While ultra-processed foods are known for their affordability and convenience, it is important to consider how eating these foods and meals could negatively impact your health. It's also important though to not let the headlines scare you and learn more about the health effects ultra-processed foods can have outside of what you may see online or on television.

HOW CAN THESE FOODS IMPACT YOUR HEALTH?

Hearing diagnoses such as cancer, heart disease or type 2 diabetes can certainly be intimidating, especially when being associated with the consumption of ultra-processed foods. The preservatives and additives I mentioned previously, specifically nitrates and nitrites, are significant contributors to the negative health claims that are linked to ultra-processed foods. While nitrates can also be found naturally in fruits and vegetables and can even have beneficial effects, nitrates and nitrites used as preservatives in foods can have the opposite effect. The reason being is that these additives can lead to the development of nitrosamines in the body, which is a carcinogenic compound that can lead to negative effects on cardiovascular and metabolic function. Sodium is also a concern for ultra-processed foods, as it is used in high amounts in processed foods to help extend shelf life and further preserve foods. High intake of sodium in the diet can increase the risk of developing long-term heart-related health issues without dietary improvement. Sodas and similar beverages with high amounts of sugar can also be a concern when drunk on a frequent basis, as it can lead to increased blood sugar levels which is a contributing factor to the development of conditions such as type 2 diabetes.

OVERCONSUMPTION VS. MODERATION

So, does this mean you should never eat ultra-processed foods? Well, not necessarily. As previously mentioned, it's hard to come across foods that haven't been processed to some capacity, whether it's to a small or large degree. As such, unless you're preparing most of your meals and snacks from scratch, it's inevitable that you will eat processed foods throughout your life.



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This is especially true if you're on a budget or have lots of time constraints that may require you to rely on ultra-processed meals and snacks from time to time. However, eating ultra-processed foods in moderation can help reduce the risk of long-term health effects that could result from overconsumption of the adverse ingredients found in these foods. Being mindful of what processed foods you're eating and how often is a good strategy to ensure you aren't eating them in high quantities.

TIPS FOR EATING LESS ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

If you want to reduce the amount of ultra-processed food you consume, keeping track of how much you eat daily or in a week is a good start. You can start by making an initial goal to build off your current eating habits. For example, instead of eating fast food five times a week, you could make a goal to reduce your fast food intake to three times a week. As you start meeting your goals, you can continue to lower the frequency of your fast food intake until you reach a final goal you feel satisfied with. This can also apply to any other ultra-processed meals such as canned or frozen commodities as well. Keeping more natural and non-ultra-processed snacks readily available in your house is also a helpful strategy. If you get bored around the house or need something to eat between meals, you might want something to snack on until then.

By eliminating ultra-processed options available in your home, the less likely you will be to choose that option when selecting a snack. For example, instead of keeping potato chips in your pantry, you could replace them with fruits or vegetables such as carrot sticks or snap peas that are easy to snack on. Your environment can play a key role in your food choices, and creating an environment with healthier alternatives to ultra-processed foods and snacks can help with that. If you don't want to completely eliminate ultra-processed snacks or foods however, you can still carry them in your house but can keep a smaller amount than you usually purchase.

Having a support system in friends or family can also be helpful when trying to cut back on ultra-processed foods. Whether you just need someone to talk to as you make dietary changes or have a partner to join you in your goals, having someone to rely on when adjusting your diet can foster positivity towards your goals. Dietary goals and healthy eating is highly individualized, and how much ultra-processed foods you're cutting out, meals you plan and goals you set will be based on your schedule and preferences. Again, you don't have to completely cut out these ultra-processed foods, as moderation is crucial and will help maintain healthier eating habits.

About the author:

My name is McKenna Killion and I'm a second-year graduate student in the MS/DI program at West Virginia University. I earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Human Nutrition and Foods in May 2024 as well as a minor in Communication Studies at West Virginia University too. I'm currently working on a non-thesis problem report about different plant-based oils, foods and dietary patterns and how they impact lipid values in adults with familial hypercholesterolemia. I am originally from Mechanicsville, MD and have gained an interest in clinical nutrition and medical nutrition therapy through my internship rotations. I love learning about how what we eat impacts our minds and bodies, and want to use what I learn to help others when I enter the dietetic field.



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INTERVIEW WITH LISA ASHCRAFT-CARR, RDN

By Kendall Hess, BS, Dietetic Intern

Briefly introduce yourself! you can add fun things too such as hobbies or a fun fact.

I have been working as a Registered Dietitian since February of 1995. I began my career working as a consultant dietitian with Keegan and Associates, travelling throughout West Virginia to provide services to nursing homes and small hospitals. After nine years, I accepted a position at United Hospital Center as a clinical inpatient dietitian, where I continue to practice today. I love spending time near the water be it a lake or the beach. I love spending time with my pets and am passionate about animal rescue.



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Could you tell me why you decided to choose this career path?

I decided to pursue a career in health science to help make a difference in people's lives through nutrition. Seeing my father and other family members face health challenges inspired me to focus on prevention and management of conditions using evidenced based dietary guidelines.

What led you to specialize in critical care and oncology?

I was drawn to oncology and critical care because I have seen how much nutrition can impact a patient's recovery and quality of life during a serious illness.

What does being a dietitian mean to you personally?

Being a dietitian means helping others take control of their health and improve their quality of life through nutrition.

What aspects of your job bring you the most satisfaction?

Building trust with patients, advocating for their needs and being part of a multidisciplinary team.

What are the biggest nutritional challenges you face when working with critical care patients or oncology patients?

One of the biggest challenges I face is ensuring adequate nutrition while managing complex medical conditions and poor tolerance. In critical care, patients often have issues such as GI dysfunction and metabolic instability that make nutrition support challenging. In Oncology, the nutrition plan requires adjusted based on patient's changing condition from treatment side effects.



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How do you approach creating nutrition plans for patients who may be dealing with treatment side effects or altered metabolism?

By listening to what the patient has to say about the treatment side effects and then tailoring the nutrition plan to their individual needs, preferences and side effects.

Where do you see the future of dietetics going, or hope for it to go?

I hope the future of dietetics continues to focus on personalized, patient-centered care helping people feel their best through nutrition.

What skills beyond nutrition knowledge are essential for success in this field?

Strong communication skills are essential beyond nutrition knowledge when working with patients, families, and other members of the healthcare team. This includes the ability to clearly explain and educate patients about nutrition care plans in a way they can understand and also actively listening to their concerns and preferences.

What are the most common misconceptions about clinical dietitians that you encounter?

Many people think that clinical dietitians only focus on weight, but we actually help manage medical conditions, provide education

What keeps you motivated during challenging cases or difficult days?

Reminding myself that behind every case is a person and even small nutritional interventions can bring comfort and make a difference.

Do you have any advice for dietetic students who are aspiring clinical dietitians?

Strong clinical knowledge is important, but empathy and good communication skills are what turn knowledge into effective nutritional care. Also, never stop asking questions.

About the author:

Born and raised in WV, I'm an aspiring registered dietitian with a passion for helping people feel their best through personalized nutrition. I'm excited to begin my career educating and motivating patients to improve their health through nutrition. Outside of work, life is busy and fun with my fiancé and our four cats, who keep things entertaining. We are looking forward for spring to start hiking and camping. My go to snack right now is carrots and garlic hummus!



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