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You Are What You Eat

A common phrase heard growing up was: “You are what you eat.” The phrase was often stated to children, in order to teach them of the consequences and benefits of their eating habits. Therefore, if a child constantly ate junk food, their body would turn into junk, but if they ate healthy foods, then they would become healthy. Although this used to just be a saying to teach children about which foods to eat, it is now a saying with scientific backing. On February 12th, 2019, Nicholas Bakalar posted a *New York Times* article titled, “Eating Processed Foods Tied to Shorter Life.” His article was centered around the health consequences that are associated with eating certain types of foods. The foods he discussed were not organic or plant based, but are highly manufactured and processed. The article refers to a JAMA Internal Medicine long-term study that observed the diet and health of 44,000 French men and women over a period of eight years. Bakalar objectively informs his audience, the general public, that consuming a diet consisting of processed foods can lead to increased risk of death.

The article discussed the results of the JAMA study, which followed participants beginning at the age of 58 years old. Almost a third of their diets consisted of instant noodles, breakfast cereals, energy bars and drinks, chicken nuggets, or other ready-made foods, all of which were considered to be “ultra-processed.” There was an accounting for the external factors of the lives of those who were in the study, such as their health prior to the study, social and economic stressors, as well as behavioral or emotional risk factors. The conclusions of the study

were that there was a direct relationship with death and consuming processed foods (with every ten percent increase in ultraprocessed food, there was a 14 percent increase in death). Even within the study, 602 deaths that occurred were mostly from diseases that were cancerous or from cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease was directly correlated with eating ultraprocessed foods with high levels of sugar, sodium, and cholesterol. The temperature at which the food was cooked at changes the health effect that they pose. For example, many of the foods that are ultra-processed are fried, which can form carcinogenic contaminants. On top of this, additives, preservatives, or even packaging with food contaminants can all be cancerous as well. Therefore, as both cancer and cardiovascular disease are life threatening, there was an association with processed foods and death found by the study.

Bakalar's article was quick to the point and easy to read, perfect for a general audience to readily consume. His writing was very formal, scientific, and unbiased, as he tried to emphasize plainly the results of the journal that he was referring to. In order to strengthen the article's ethos, Bakalar did add a quote from a research director from a public health research center, which appears to be an expert opinion in this field. The purpose of the author was quite clear, in that he wanted to open the eyes of the reader to the very real consequences of eating unhealthy food, without the added use of personal stories or narratives to confuse or distract the reader from the main point of the article. One tactic that Bakalar did use to help him raise awareness of his case was to use shock value to grab the attention of the reader. He used arousing language in his title, with standout words like "shorter life," which of course would cause a reader to look more into his article, especially since the examples of the causes of a shorter life in the subtitle were commonly eaten foods. However, he still maintained his generally neutral writing style and balanced out the title by ending his article with a reassurance from the expert that his piece was

not to alarm the public but to inform them that there is simply an association, not a causation of death from eating ultraprocessed foods.

References

Bakalar N. Eating Processed Foods Tied to Shorter Life. The New York Times. 2019 Feb 12

[accessed 2019 Feb 19]. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/well/eat/eating-processed-foods-longevity-death-mortality.html>