

# Beyond the Barracks: Structuring Wellness in Civilian Life



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## Community: **Pillars**



**COMMUNITY**



**ACTIVITY**



**MENTAL HEALTH**



**RECOVERY & SLEEP**



**NUTRITION**

## Ultra-Processed Foods: What Veterans Need to Know

After years of structure menus and meals times, the civilian grocery store can feel like a whole new adventure to begin with, and we'll dive into how to tackle the grocery store in future issues. This month, we wanted to engage a new and common term that is getting a lot of attention in the news, on social media, and in wellness circles: "Ultra-processed foods." We are going to spend this issue outlining what "ultra-processed" means and exploring if we, as a community, need to adjust our buying and eating habits because of it.



CONT. INSIDE ➡

MilitaryConnected.org is a nonprofit organization improving the military-connected community's transition experience through employer education, data driven research, and access to a network of job opportunities with military-ready employers.

The Vegetus Foundation is dedicated to helping Americans improve their quality of life through education on healthy living and has published the Nutrition Health Review since 1979. Learn more at [nutritionhealthreview.com](https://nutritionhealthreview.com)



LEARN MORE AT [MILITARYCONNECTED.ORG](https://militaryconnected.org)



## What are ultra-processed foods?

A good rule of thumb is, does the food seem manufactured vs. prepared? Ultra-processed food production involves numerous industrial steps and equipment not used in regular food preparation. Their design is focused on taste and shelf life, as opposed to nutritional value or concern for long-term health implications. Often, the priority of ultra-processed foods is not to ensure our population is well-fed, but large food companies are profitable.

### Here are some key things to look out for:

- **Long and Unfamiliar Ingredient List:** Often includes added sugars (like dextrose), modified substances (like hydrogenated oils), and artificial additives (like colors and flavors).
- **Industrial Production:** Made with processes and equipment not used at home, often engineered for palatability and long shelf life.
- **Additives for Texture:** Contains emulsifiers, thickeners, and gelling agents.
- **Nutritionally Imbalanced:** High in added sugars, unhealthy fats, and sodium, but low in vitamins, minerals, and fiber; contains little whole food.

### Why are they popular?

- **Profitability:** They can be made with cheaper ingredients, have longer shelf lives (reducing waste), and can be produced at a large scale with automated processes, all contributing to lower production costs and higher profit margins.
- **Economies of Scale:** Mass production drives down the cost per unit, making these foods more affordable for consumers.
- **Globalized Food System:** Ingredients can be sourced globally from the cheapest suppliers, further reducing costs.
- **Urbanization:** As more people live in urban areas, access to fresh, locally sourced foods may be limited compared to readily available processed options in supermarkets and convenience stores.
- **Highly – Palatable:** In short, they taste really good even if they are bad for us.

## Why are ultra-processed foods harmful?

Ultra-processed foods can be detrimental to health for several reasons. Their high content of added sugars, unhealthy fats, and sodium can contribute to weight gain, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure. The lack of essential nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and fiber can lead to nutritional deficiencies and poor gut health. Additionally, the artificial additives and ingredients in these foods may trigger inflammation and other adverse reactions in some individuals. The hyper-palatable nature of these foods can also disrupt natural hunger cycles, leading to overeating and further health problems.

## Why Veterans Struggle With Civilian Careers

podcast with Scott DeLuzio and Jon Safran

May 1, 2025



[Click here to listen to the podcast](#)





### What we should do about it?

The best approach is to prioritize whole, unprocessed foods as much as possible. This includes fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats. Reading food labels carefully can help identify ultra-processed ingredients. Making simple swaps, like choosing water over soda or cooking at home more often, can significantly reduce the intake of these foods. It's also beneficial to be mindful of portion sizes and practice mindful eating to better regulate hunger and fullness. While it may not be possible to eliminate ultra processed foods from our diet, it can be managed.

### Relatable Examples

- **Snacks:** Chips, flavored crackers, candy bars
- **Drinks:** Sodas, energy drinks, sweetened juices
- **Breakfast:** Sugary cereals, processed breakfast bars, instant oatmeal
- **Meals:** Frozen dinners with long ingredient lists, instant noodles with flavor packets
- **Meats & Alternatives:** Processed deli meats, chicken nuggets, plant-based meat alternatives with extensive ingredient lists.
- **Condiments & Sauces:** Many store-bought dressings, sauces, and gravy mixes.

### Advancing the Military Connected Community with MilitaryConnected.org

MilitaryConnected.org connects businesses across the nation with top military connected talent. Our mission is to end attrition and unemployment in the workplace for military connected employees.

With our unique, holistic approach to talent engagement, employer education, and data-driven research, MilitaryConnected.org and our platform is the nation's best veteran and military family employment engagement strategy.

By entering your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) code into a job matching tool, you can identify civilian careers that align with your military training and experience. These tools, such as the Veterans Job Matcher, analyze your MOS to suggest relevant occupations, providing information on matching roles. This approach helps veterans translate their military skills into civilian-applicable qualifications, potentially streamlining the job search process by focusing on compatible opportunities. Access this FREE service on our platform by [CLICKING HERE](#)

## Baked Jalapeño Poppers



#### Approximate nutrition information per serving, 2 poppers:\*

Calories: Approximately 180; Total Fat: 11g; Saturated Fat: 6g; Cholesterol: 31mg; Sodium: 400mg; Total Carbohydrates: 16g; Dietary Fiber: 2g; Sugars: 2g; Protein: 7g;

\*Adjustments can be made to reduce the fat content further by using even lighter cheese or less cream cheese.

#### Ingredients:

Servings: 6 (2 poppers per serving)

- 12 fresh jalapeño peppers
- 8 oz (1 cup) reduced-fat cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (reduced-fat)
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 cup whole-grain breadcrumbs
- Cooking spray (olive oil or vegetable oil)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Cut the jalapeño peppers in half lengthwise, leaving the stems intact. Remove the seeds and membranes. Be cautious when handling the peppers; wearing gloves can prevent skin irritation.
3. In a mixing bowl, combine the softened cream cheese, shredded cheddar cheese, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, and black pepper. Mix until well combined.
4. Fill each jalapeño half with the cheese mixture, dividing it evenly among all the pepper halves.
5. Place the whole-grain breadcrumbs in a shallow dish. Roll each stuffed jalapeño half in the breadcrumbs, pressing gently to adhere the breadcrumbs to the cheese mixture.
6. Arrange the coated jalapeño poppers on the prepared baking sheet. Lightly spray the tops of the poppers with cooking spray to help them crisp up during baking.
7. Bake in the preheated oven for about 20 to 25 minutes, or until the poppers are golden brown and the peppers have softened.

