

Ultra-processed foods triple hypertension risk in young adults

ICMR-NIN study examined 311 students aged 18 to 24 from across Hyd

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YOUNG adults in Hyderabad who frequently consume high-fat and high-salt ultra-processed foods are nearly three times more likely to develop elevated blood pressure, a new study by the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) has revealed.

The study, published in the journal *Nutrients*, examined 311 undergraduate college students aged 18 to 24 from across the city. Researchers found that 12.5% of the participants already suffered from high blood pressure, a statistic that highlights increasing cardiovascular health risks driven by changing dietary habits among urban youth.

Researchers observed that frequent intake of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) rich in fat and salt was independently associated with significantly higher odds of elevated blood

pressure, even after adjusting for sociodemographic factors such as age, sex, residence, and family income.

According to the study, the most frequently consumed ultra-processed foods included biscuits, chocolates, packaged savoury snacks, bread products, sugary beverages, and instant foods. Students cited taste, convenience, affordability, and easy availability as the main reasons for choosing such foods.

Researchers noted that modern urban lifestyles and easy access to packaged goods are increasingly exposing young adults to long-term health risks at an earlier stage of life.

Dr Bharati Kulkarni, director of ICMR-NIN, said the study reflects broader dietary and lifestyle changes taking place across urban India. "India is witnessing a rapid nutrition

transition, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Dietary choices made early in life can significantly influence future cardiovascular health," she said.

She stressed the need to create healthier food environments and improve nutrition literacy among young people to help prevent future health complications.

Lead authors Dr Karthikeyan S and Dr Samarasimha Reddy said the growing dependence on packaged and convenience foods among urban youth warrants urgent public health attention.

They called for targeted interventions in colleges and universities to encourage healthier eating habits and improve awareness about the risks associated with excessive ultra-processed food consumption.

