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New research demonstrates a positive dose-response relationship between the consumption of fast food and the risk of depression.

JUNK FOOD MAY INCREASE THE RISK OF DEPRESSION

A link between mental health and various nutrients in the diet, such as omega-3 fatty acids and B vitamins, has been well established. But there is little to no research on the role of fast-food or processed pastries and mental health.

Published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, researchers in Spain recently assessed the relationship between eating fast food or processed pastries and developing clinical depression.

In total, 8,964 participants were included in the study, and were followed up for an average of 6.2 years. This prospective cohort study included people who did not have a clinical diagnosis of depression and who were not taking antidepressant medication. All participants were also free of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension.

The participants completed the food frequency questionnaire at the beginning of the study. The scientists looked at two variables: fast food consumption (which included hamburgers, sausages and pizza) and consumption of commercial baked goods (which included muffins, doughnuts, croissants and other baked goods). The researchers then divided the study population into five groups (quintiles), based on the amount of each food group that they usually consumed.

The researchers collected data on other variables they thought might influence the relationship between eating habits and depression. These included age, sex, BMI, smoking status, physical activity level, total energy intake and healthy food consumption. Adjustments were then made for the influence of these variables during the statistical analysis.

People with the highest level of consumption of fast-food and commercial baked goods had a 37% increased risk of developing depression compared to the lowest consumption group.

Although it cannot conclusively show that eating lots of hamburgers, sausages and pizza causes depression, this study suggests that there may be an association between eating a lot of fast food or baked goods and developing depression.

Almudena Sánchez-Villegasa et al. Fast-food and commercial baked goods consumption and the risk of depression. Public Health Nutrition March 2012 15: pp 424-432.