

# Ultra-processed foods: a consumer perspective

## A summary of our consumer research

### What we did:

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, we measured consumer awareness, understanding and perceptions of ultra-processed foods, or UPFs, in relation to their shopping choices in the retail environment.

The UPF concept has gained significant traction recently. While the evidence behind the UPF concept is still developing, we wanted to take a deeper dive into the consumer perspective.

### What we found:

- Processing is not front of mind when consumers are making food choices
- 2 in 5 consumers claim to understand what the term 'ultra-processed' means
- Consumers underestimate the amount of UPFs they consume
- Consumers are unable to accurately identify most UPFs tested
- Learning about ultra-processing evokes strong emotions and is confusing for consumers
- Consumers identify several barriers to reducing UPF consumption, including price, habit, shelf-life, family preferences and preparation time

### What we recommend:

- We recommend that the evidence on the role of food processing and its impact on health continues to be monitored
- We need to consider carefully how we communicate healthy eating guidance to consumers, recognising their challenges in understanding the UPF concept alongside dietary guidelines and the risk of causing greater confusion
- It is important to focus efforts on making healthy and sustainable diets easy and accessible for everyone. This is the basis of IGD's extensive programme of research and resources to support the food industry

## What are ultra-processed foods?

UPFs are defined as those which are made using industrial additives and processes that wouldn't be found in a household kitchen. A high consumption of UPFs has been linked with several negative health outcomes.

