



WELLNESS

In the News

Catch up on the latest **wellness-related developments** from the past month.

Ultra-processed Foods Linked to 12 Health Conditions

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) have become a significant part of diets worldwide, but new research reveals that this convenience comes with substantial health risks. Recent reviews published in leading medical journals reveal that UPFs are linked to at least 12 chronic conditions and higher mortality rates, making this a growing concern.

A review of 104 long-term studies found strong links between UPF consumption and various health conditions, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, Crohn's disease, depression, obesity, hypertension, chronic kidney disease and high cholesterol.

UPFs are industrially manufactured products designed for long shelf life and mass appeal. They often contain additives, preservatives and artificial flavors, while often lacking essential nutrients, such as fiber and vitamins. Common examples include sugary cereals, canned soups, frozen meals, sodas, chips and processed meats. These foods are cheap, easy to transport, quick to prepare and heavily marketed, which are all factors that have fueled their global popularity.

The good news is that small changes can make a difference. Swap processed snacks for fruits or nuts. Read labels to spot added sugars and long ingredient lists. Even reducing one UPF item daily can improve your health over time. For personalized guidance, consider consulting a registered dietitian or health care provider.

Missing First Mammogram Linked to Increased Risk of Cancer Death

A recent study published in The BMJ found that skipping the first mammogram was linked to a 40% higher risk of dying from breast cancer. Researchers tracked more than 400,000 women in Sweden for up to 25 years.

When breast cancer is found while still localized, five-year survival rates exceed 99%, according to the American Cancer Society. Once it spreads, survival drops to about 32%. In the U.S., breast cancer remains the second most common cancer and the second-leading cause of cancer death among women, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Guidelines have shifted to reflect this urgency. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force now recommends starting mammograms at age 40 and continuing every other year until age 74. Many

health organizations recommend annual screenings starting at 40, especially for individuals at higher risk. New federal rules effective January 2026 will require insurance plans to cover follow-up imaging and biopsies after abnormal results, removing a significant financial barrier to care.

If you're 40 or older, or have a family history of breast cancer, schedule your mammogram today. Check your health benefits for coverage details and use available resources for assistance with appointments and transportation.

Just Two Cigarettes a Day Raises Cardiovascular Disease Risk by Over 50%

A study published in the Public Library of Science (PLOS) found that people who smoke as few as two cigarettes per day have a 57% higher risk of heart failure and a 60% higher risk of death from any cause. The study involved more than 300,000 adults and nearly 20 years of follow-ups. Researchers add that a person's health risks decline significantly in the decade after quitting smoking. However, a former smoker can still have increased health risks three decades after giving up tobacco.

ScienceDaily reported similar results, and the NIH warns that any smoking, even social or occasional, can be toxic to blood vessels. The Ohio State University notes that even one cigarette a day can increase the risk of early death by over 60% and can trigger nicotine addiction. Another study tracking people with hypertension, diabetes or high cholesterol found that worsening smoking habits elevated the risk of heart attack, stroke and cardiovascular death by 33%.

If you're ready to quit smoking, there are resources available to help you succeed. Many people find support through counseling, quit-smoking programs and nicotine replacement options. You can also explore coaching services, community health

programs or online tools designed to create a personalized quit plan. These services are often free or low-cost and are designed to make quitting easier and more successful. If your workplace offers an employee assistance program (EAP), take advantage of it. EAPs typically provide confidential counseling, guidance and referrals to help you quit.

Stay tuned for more wellness-related news and developments.

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