GENERAL HEALTH

The Dark Truth Behind “Healthy” Marketed Foods: A Slow Poison?

Pulipati Harshitha*

* *Correspondence: Pulipati Harshitha*

Received: 06 February 2026 **Published:** 30 March 2026 **Volume 13, Issue 1** (Jan–Mar 2026)
Article no.: e180 **Open access** · free to read

In today?s world, eating ?**healthy**? has become a trend rather than a habit. Supermarket shelves are flooded with products proudly labelled **organic, low-fat, sugar-free, protein-rich, and heart-healthy**. These words immediately trigger trust. We assume that if something is marketed as healthy, it must be good for our bodies.

But what if that trust is **misplaced**?

Behind attractive packaging and persuasive advertisements, many so-called **healthy foods** hide ingredients that silently harm the body over time. They may not cause immediate illness, but their **long-term consumption** can contribute to **metabolic disorders, hormonal imbalances, gut disturbances, kidney stress, and chronic inflammation**. This is not instant poison ? it is slow damage, subtle enough to go unnoticed until it becomes a health problem.

The modern food industry has mastered the art of selling health without truly delivering it. **Scientific terms** are **selectively used**, **nutrients** are **exaggerated**, and **risks** are **conveniently ignored**. As a result, consumers end up choosing products based on marketing claims rather than actual nutritional value. In the end, every individual must have an awareness that **real health is built on informed choices, not attractive labels.**

What is a ?Slow Poison??

A **slow poison** refers to substances that cause **harm** through **long term, repeated exposure** rather than **immediate toxicity**. Slow poison foods often appear **harmless or beneficial**, but they are **composed of certain components** which, **on repeated consumption**, may **negatively affect** the **health over time**. Such substances my **interfere with metabolic processes,** may lead to **chronic inflammation**, or place **sustained stress** on organs like **liver** and **kidneys**. Hence, one must understand what lies behind these labels to make informed decisions about their diet and health.

BREAKFAST CEREALS

Cereals are processed food products predominantly consumed as breakfast, often with milk, fruits or nuts. They are available in various forms such as **cornflakes, muesli,** and other **cereal-based products** commonly made from **corn, rice, wheat, or oats**. Breakfast cereals are frequently eaten by a large population and are commonly perceived as healthy breakfast option. They are marketed as **low-fat** and **high fibre** food that provide essential nutrients and energy among both children and adults. However commercially available breakfast cereals are **highly processed** and contain **artificial flavours, added sugars, preservatives,** and other **chemical additives** to enhance their taste and shelf life. Studies have shown that regular consumption of such processed ingredients may lead to a **potential risk of cancer, obesity** and other **adverse metabolic effects**. It has also been reported presence of trace amounts of naturally occurring **radioactive elements**, such as**, uranium, thorium,** and **potassium-40** in cereal products. Although the traced levels are usually **within the regulatory safety limits**, daily intake of cereal has raised concerns regarding the **potential long-term health risks.**

ARTIFICIAL SWEETNERS

Artificial sweeteners are **chemical substances** used to **replace sugar** in many foods and drinks. They are commonly found in **diet sodas, sugar-free snacks, packaged foods, medicines, and chewing gums.** These sweeteners are much sweeter than sugar but **contain little or no calories**, which is why many people believe they are a healthy choice. However, research suggests that using artificial sweeteners regularly over a long period may **harm the body by disturbing the digestive system**, causing problems like **bloating, gas**, and **changes in bowel movements**. They may **also affect the healthy bacteria in the gut**, which are important for digestion, immunity, and overall health.

Some people experience **headaches, dizziness**, or **changes in taste** after consuming artificial sweeteners. Over time, these products may also **interfere with the body?s ability to control blood sugar**. Several studies have linked frequent use of artificial sweeteners to a **higher risk of diabetes, weight gain, and heart disease,** especially when **consumed daily**.

PACKAGED FRUIT JUICES

Natural fruit juices made at home from fresh fruits are **healthy** and **beneficial** for the body. They are **rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants**, and **natural sugars** that **support digestion, boost immunity,** and help **protect against diseases** such **as heart problems, anaemia,** and **digestive disorders**. In contrast, **processed and packaged fruit juices** which are marketed to be **?healthy?** and **?nutrient-rich?** differ significantly from natural juices**.** During processing, many **nutrients are lost**, and artificial substances such as **preservatives, added sugars, flavour enhancers,** and **sweeteners** are commonly added to **improve taste** and **extend shelf life**. These additives can **reduce the health value of the juice** and may **negatively affect the body when consumed regularly.**

Another major concern with packaged fruit juices is **plastic packaging. Harmful chemicals from plastic bottles**, such as **phthalates,** can **slowly leak into the juice over time**. These chemicals may **disturb hormones** and have been **linked to long-term health problems**, including **metabolic disorders** and **reproductive issues**.

PLANT BASED FOOD PRODUCTS

Plant-based meat and dairy alternatives are often advertised as **healthy, clean,** and **environmentally friendly foods**. Many people believe these products are safer than meat and milk and choose them to improve their health or protect the planet. While reducing meat intake can have benefits, **highly processed plant-based alternatives are not always as healthy as they appear**. These products are usually made from ingredients **like soy, peas, wheat, rice, oats, nuts,** and **seeds**. Because plants grow in soil, they naturally absorb substances from the environment. This includes harmful metals such as **arsenic, lead, cadmium, nickel,** and **aluminium**. When these plants are processed into meat and milk substitutes, **small amounts of these harmful substances can remain in the final product**.

Studies suggest that regularly replacing meat and milk with plant-based alternatives may **increase exposure** to these **toxic metals**. For example, **rice-based plant drinks** may contain **higher levels of arsenic**, while some **plant-based meats** and **dairy** alternatives may contain **traces of lead or nickel**. Long-term exposure to these substances can slowly affect health and may **damage organs** or **increase disease risk over time**.

Another concern is that many plant-based alternatives are **highly processed**. They often contain added **oils, salt, flavours, stabilizers,** and **preservatives** to **improve taste and texture**. Frequent consumption of such **ultra-processed foods** has been **linked to poor metabolic health, weight gain,** and **heart-related problems.**

ULTRA-PROCESSED ?HEALTHY? BISCUITS / SNACKS

Many food products such as **biscuits, snacks,** and **emergency foods** are often marketed as **?healthy,? ?digestive,?** or **?nutrient rich?.** These labels make them seem suitable for daily consumption, especially for children and older adults. While some of these products do contain added **fibre, protein,** or **vitamins,** it is important to remember that they are still **processed foods**. Heavy processing can **reduce the natural quality of**

nutrients. Processed biscuits are usually made with **refined flours, added fats, sugars or sweeteners,** and **stabilizers** to improve taste, texture, and shelf life. As a result, these products do not provide the same health benefits as fresh, whole foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Another important concern is **food contamination**. In biscuits, harmful contaminants can enter the product through **raw materials** such as **cereal grains** and **vegetable oils** or can form during processing and baking. **Poor-quality raw materials or improper processing conditions can worsen food safety** rather than improve it.

CONCLUSION

In the modern food environment, health is often defined by marketing claims rather than nutritional reality. Products labelled as **healthy, natural, or plant-based** are widely trusted, yet many of them undergo **extensive processing** and contain **added sugars, artificial additives,** and other components that may **negatively influence health** when consumed regularly. While these foods **may not cause immediate harm**, their **long-term** and **cumulative effects raise important concerns**.

Daily dietary choices play a major role in our lives and overall long-term health. Every meal or snack consumed repeatedly can either **support bodily functions** or **contribute silently to metabolic disturbances and chronic health issues.** Therefore, awareness of what lies behind food labels is essential.

Rather than eliminating such foods, **adopting a balanced approach, prioritizing whole and minimally processed foods**, and **making informed decisions** can help promote **sustainable health**. Ultimately, real well-being is built not on attractive labels, but on **knowledge, moderation,** and **conscious dietary choices**.

REFERENCES

1. Halmat J. Hassan, Farhad A. Hama Hassan, Assessment of NORM and heavy metal risks from breakfast cereals consumed in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, Journal of Radiation Research and Applied Sciences, Volume 19, Issue 1, 2026, 102186, ISSN 1687-8507, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrras.2026.102186.

2. Ghusn W, Naik R, Yibirin M (December 29, 2023) The Impact of Artificial Sweeteners on Human Health and Cancer Association: A Comprehensive Clinical Review. Cureus 15(12): e51299. doi:10.7759/cureus.51299

3. Gursel Isci, Assessment of phthalate esters in packaged fruit juices sold in the Turkish market and their implications on human health risk, Food Chemistry, Volume 435, 2024, 137658, ISSN 0308-8146, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodchem.2023.137658.

4. Sofie Schryvers, Gijs Du Laing, Carl Lachat, Liesbeth Jacxsens, Risk ranking of toxic trace elements in animal- and plant-based protein sources under dietary protein transition scenarios, Food Control, Volume 183, 2026, 111958, ISSN 0956-7135, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodcont.2026.111958.

5. Bo?a, Tu??e, K?bra Topalo?lu G?nan, Seda ?akmak Kavsara, Didem Berber, and ?zlem Akt?rk G?m??ay. "Development and Characterization of High?Nutrient Biscuits for Disaster Situations Targeting At?Risk Groups." International Journal of Food Science 2025, no. 1 (2025): 8042259.

6. Pasqualone, Antonella, Noor N. Haider, Carmine Summo, Teodora Emilia Coldea, Saher S. George, and Ammar B. Altemimi. "Biscuit contaminants, their sources and mitigation strategies: A review." Foods 10, no. 11 (2021): 2751.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

How to cite this article (Vancouver)
Harshitha P. The Dark Truth Behind “Healthy” Marketed Foods: A Slow Poison? CHEARS Chronical. 2026;13(1):e180. Available from: https://chears.in/journal/volume-13/issue-1/the-dark-truth-behind-healthy-marketed-foods-a-slow-poison-180
Published in CHEARS Chronical.
https://chears.in/journal/volume-13/issue-1/the-dark-truth-behind-healthy-marketed-foods-a-slow-poison-180