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Commentary

Dietary Patterns and Ultra-Processed Foods: An Analysis of Nutritional Intake Among HIV-Positive Women During Pregnancy

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COMMENTARY

Pregnancy induces physiological changes in a woman's body, altering her nutritional requirements and food consumption patterns. Inadequate intake of macro and micronutrients can lead to competition for essential nutrients between the mother and the fetus, potentially hindering the fetus's proper growth and development [1,2].

HIV-positive women experience heightened energy and nutritional demands during pregnancy. Insufficient dietary intake, particularly lack of essential nutrients, can increase the risk of vertical transmission of the virus, accelerate disease progression, elevate the likelihood of opportunistic infections, and adversely impact the effectiveness of antiretroviral medications [3,4].

The author of the referenced article investigates the daily dietary intake of both HIV-positive and HIV-negative women during pregnancy, specifically focusing on the contribution of ultra-processed foods. Ultra-processed foods are industrial formulations primarily composed of food substances (such as oils, fats, sugars, and proteins) or derived from food constituents (like hydrogenated fats and modified starches), as well as synthetic compounds created from organic materials (including dyes, flavorings, and various additives) designed to enhance sensory appeal [5]. These foods typically lack sufficient micronutrients, as their concentrations are lower than those found in fresh or minimally processed foods, presenting a significant nutritional challenge globally. Micronutrient deficiencies are particularly critical to public health during pregnancy [6].

Our study found that approximately 40% of the daily caloric intake among pregnant women came from ultra-processed foods. This excessive consumption correlated with reduced intake of proteins and fibers, alongside increased consumption of carbohydrates, trans fats, and sodium. HIV-positive women specifically consumed lower amounts of protein, carbohydrates, and calcium while consuming higher total fats. These findings illustrate the alarming rise in global consumption of ultra-processed foods, which is associated with substantial nutritional deficiencies. The established importance of adequate nutrition during pregnancy for optimal fetal development underscores the need for targeted dietary interventions, particularly for HIV-positive women, to mitigate adverse maternal and fetal outcomes.

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