# New report challenges ultra-processed food label for plant-based meats



Research surrounding ultra-processed foods (UPFs) has frequently overlooked important distinctions within the plant-based meat sector, potentially misleading consumers regarding their health impacts. A recent review highlights that concerns about the nutritional quality of these alternatives may be unjustly inflated, particularly given the growing consumer apprehension surrounding UPFs. In the UK, for instance, half of consumers express worries about the unnatural nature of these products, with 54% of Europeans avoiding them due to their UPF classification. This scepticism extends to the United States, where one in four Americans would purchase more meat alternatives if they were perceived as less processed.

Amidst a backdrop of declining sales, particularly a 7% drop in U.S. retail for plant-based meats last year, this conversation has sparked significant debate in both science and public health. Health experts urge a more nuanced approach to understanding UPFs, asserting that processing and nutritional quality are not synonymous. A new report from the Physicians Association for Nutrition (PAN) and the Good Food Institute (GFI) Europe reinforces this perspective, providing a vital resource for healthcare professionals engaged in dietary recommendations.

The report asserts that while research has linked UPFs with negative health outcomes due to factors such as high calorie density and low dietary fibre content, plant-based meats often deviate from these characteristics. Instead, they tend to offer a more favourable nutritional profile when compared to conventional processed meats. Specifically, plant-based meats demonstrate a higher fibre content and lower levels of saturated fat, adhering to only three of the eight metrics typically used to classify UPFs, in stark contrast to conventional processed meats, which meet seven. This distinction is crucial, suggesting that plant-based options can genuinely support better health outcomes, including improved cholesterol levels and modest weight loss.

A critical examination of past UPF studies reveals their limitations. Many rely on outdated food diaries, failing to capture the evolution of modern meat alternatives that dominate today’s market. Notably, in the UK Biobank study that is often referenced, plant-based meats accounted for a mere 0.2% of total caloric intake, a statistic that should temper conclusions drawn about their impact on health. Instead, the culprits behind UPF-associated health risks are likely more aligned with traditionally harmful products such as sugary snacks and processed meats, rather than newer plant-based options.

As the discourse on UPFs grows increasingly polarized, experts like Roberta Alessandrini from PAN underscore the need for public health messaging that accurately reflects the diversity within this category. The report urges health professionals to clarify the misconceptions surrounding plant-based meats and their processing methods.

In line with the need for clearer communication, the report also advocates for enhanced research aimed at understanding the health implications of plant-based meats more comprehensively. Future studies should not only diversify evidence on UPF features that could drive harm but also identify qualities in vegan alternatives that elicit beneficial health outcomes. Policymakers are encouraged to develop dietary guidelines that promote healthier choices amongst consumers, focusing on important aspects like fortifications, fibre, and salt content in plant-based products.

In summary, the evolving narrative around plant-based meats suggests they may serve as a more healthful alternative to conventional processed meats, contrary to some prevailing views that group all UPFs together indiscriminately. As more evidence surfaces, the future may well see a reassessment of how these products are classified and perceived, with the potential to better inform public health strategies aimed at fostering nutritious choices in the context of a climate-conscious food system.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[3]](https://www.pan-foundation.org/nutrition-insights/position-paper-on-plant-based-meat-products)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[6]](https://gfieurope.org/plant-based-meat-and-health-in-europe/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[4]](https://ift.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1750-3841.17355)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[5]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/nutritional-composition-of-ultraprocessed-plantbased-foods-in-the-outofhome-environment-a-multicountry-survey-with-plantbased-burgers/F8367FCF566A1D2D92A05BB91325FB4C)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[7]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S000291652401428X)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[6]](https://gfieurope.org/plant-based-meat-and-health-in-europe/)
8. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/), [[3]](https://www.pan-foundation.org/nutrition-insights/position-paper-on-plant-based-meat-products)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/plant-based-meat-ultra-processed-food-upf-health-vegan/> - This article discusses how research on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) often overlooks the nuances of plant-based meats, potentially misleading consumers about their health impacts. It highlights that while UPFs are generally associated with negative health outcomes, plant-based meats have a different nutritional profile and may offer health benefits. The article also points out limitations in current UPF studies, such as outdated food diaries and the failure to separate plant proteins from meat analogues, which can lead to misleading conclusions about the health impacts of plant-based meats.
3. <https://www.pan-foundation.org/nutrition-insights/position-paper-on-plant-based-meat-products> - The PAN International Foundation's position paper examines the role of plant-based meat products in preventing non-communicable diseases and addressing the climate crisis. It emphasizes the importance of whole-food, plant-based diets and environmentally sustainable protein sources like legumes and whole grains. The paper also discusses the potential of plant-based meat products as a convenient transition to plant-based diets and the need for manufacturers to provide healthy and sustainable food choices.
4. <https://ift.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1750-3841.17355> - This study reviews the current state of meat alternatives, including plant-based and cell-based ingredients, and discusses the contentious classification of these products as ultra-processed foods (UPFs). It highlights concerns regarding the potential adverse effects of UPF consumption on health and nutrition. The study also examines the market potential, drivers, and barriers associated with different types of meat alternatives, proposing a reassessment of the UPF classification system and the establishment of uniform nutritional profiles for meat alternatives.
5. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/nutritional-composition-of-ultraprocessed-plantbased-foods-in-the-outofhome-environment-a-multicountry-survey-with-plantbased-burgers/F8367FCF566A1D2D92A05BB91325FB4C> - This study analyzes the nutritional composition of ultra-processed plant-based burgers available in the out-of-home environment across multiple countries. The findings indicate that these burgers provide protein, dietary fiber, and essential minerals but also contain relatively high levels of energy, sodium, and total fats. The amino acid composition suggests low protein quality. The study underscores the need for manufacturers to implement improvements to better support healthy dietary habits, including reducing energy, sodium, and total fats.
6. <https://gfieurope.org/plant-based-meat-and-health-in-europe/> - This report by GFI Europe discusses the health implications of plant-based meat in Europe. It concludes that plant-based meat offers a straightforward swap that can improve diet quality without significant behavior change. The report recommends investing in research to develop next-generation plant-based meat products, diversifying ingredient crops, and advancing novel processing technologies to enhance nutritional value. It also emphasizes the importance of better communication of health benefits to consumers and the need for high-quality trials investigating the health impacts of swapping plant-based for conventional meat.
7. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S000291652401428X> - This systematic review and meta-analysis examines the effects of novel plant-based meat alternatives compared to meat consumption on cardiometabolic parameters in individuals without cardiovascular diseases. The study found that replacing meat with plant-based meat alternatives led to reduced total cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol, and triglycerides. The review highlights the potential cardioprotective effects of plant-based meat alternatives, primarily due to their lower saturated fatty acid content and higher fiber, which could reduce LDL-cholesterol concentrations.